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CHARLES II
by JOHN HAYWARD

Great Lives

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The Truth is, the Calling of a King, with all its glittering, hath such an unreasonable weight upon it, that they may rather expect to be lamented, than to be envied ; for being set upon a Pinacle, where they are exposed to Censure, if they do not more to answer Men's Expectations, than corrupted Nature will allow.

HALIFAX, A Character of Charles II.

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To
RICHARD JENNINGS

CHRONOLOGY

- 1630 (May 29). Born at St. James's Palace.
1642-1649. The Civil War.
1642 (Oct.)-1645 (March). Resident at Oxford.
1645 (March)-1646 (Feb.). In the West Country.
1646 (July). Escapes to France. Stays in Paris.
1649 (Jan.). Charles I. beheaded.
1649-1660. The Commonwealth.
1650 (March). Joins the Covenanters in Scotland.
1650 (Sept.). Cromwell defeats Covenanters at Dunbar.
1651 (Sept.). Routed by Cromwell at Worcester.
1651 (Oct.). Escapes again to France.
1651 (Oct.)-1654 (June). In poverty in Paris.
1652-1654. First Dutch War.
1654-1658. Resident at Cologne, Bruges and Brussels.
1658 (Sept.). Death of Oliver Cromwell.
1660 (April). Declaration of Breda.
1660 (May). Restored to the English throne.
1660 (April-Dec.). Convention Parliament.
1660-1667. Administration of Clarendon.
1661 (May)-1679 (Jan.). Cavalier or Long Parliament.

- 1662 (May). Marries Catherine of Braganza.
1665-1667. Second Dutch War.
1665 (June-Dec.). The Plague.
1666 (Sept.). Fire of London.
1667-1673. Administration of the Cabal.
1668. Triple Alliance with Sweden and Holland.
1670 (May). Secret Treaty of Dover.
1672. Declaration of Indulgence.
1672-1674. Third Dutch War.
1673. The Test Act.
1674-1678. Administration of Danby.
1677 (Nov.). Marriage of Mary to William of Orange.
1678 (Aug.). Peace of Nimeguen.
1678 (Sept.). Popish Plot invented by Titus Oates.
1679-1681. Exclusion Bill contest.
1679 (March-July). Habeas Corpus or first Whig Parliament.
1680 (Oct.)-1681 (Jan.). Second Whig Parliament.
1681 (March 21-28). Third Whig or Oxford Parliament.
1681-1685. The Tory reaction.
1683 (June). Rye House Plot discovered.
1685 (Feb. 6). Dies at Whitehall.
1685 (Feb. 17). Buried in Westminster Abbey.

CHARLES II

ON the 29th of May of the year 1630, Venus, the morning star, shone over London at noon-day. Three hundred years ago, such a wonderful sign as not wasted on a credulous people ; for stars and comets and all the extraordinary revolutions of the spheres were properly regarded then as the inomitants of great events upon earth, appearing only at such times and places as marked the fall of kingdoms or the births and deaths of nations. It was therefore fitting that such a sign should have appeared in London, but most fitly in the neighbourhood of Whitehall, on an early summer morning to record the birthday of an infant who, after many trials and adversities, was to become King of England. Two days later, the sun was almost totally eclipsed, but this sombre portent was conveniently overlooked during the general rejoicing appropriate to the birth of an heir to the throne.

When a month had passed, this child, the first living son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, was duly christened by the Archbishop of Canterbury according to the Anglican faith. It was a

sad, rainy day when the sponsors of the infant Charles Stuart undertook for him promises which were very loosely kept and very inadequately fulfilled in after years.

At that time, however, he was merely a plump baby, swarthy and vigorous, and so ugly that even his mother pretended to be ashamed of him, although she boasted, with pardonable pride, that "his size and features supply the want of beauty."

As Charles grew into boyhood in the sober atmosphere of his father's Court, these compensating graces seem to have played a curious part in his relations with Mrs. Windham, his nurse. This familiar creature — as Clarendon, anticipating the observations of Freud, gravely relates in his memoirs — would snatch him up, and "when the concourse of the people was greatest — *nihil muliebre præter corpus gerens* — would use great boldness towards him." How much, one wonders in passing, was his adult life to be conditioned by these early influences? By the time he was eight years old, the more obvious and conventional part of his education was begun with the appointment of two tutors, Brian Dupper, who afterwards became Bishop of Winchester, and that "very fine gentleman" and perfect pattern of the old nobility, William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle.

Charles, whose memory for services rendered is lamentably short after he became King, could never quite forget how much he owed to his old and friendly adviser. For it was he who laid the foundations of his pupil's character and dedicated his head to the crown. "Believe it," advised in one of his letters, "the putting off your hat and making a leg pleases more than any guard or preservation ; so much doth it take all kinds of people." If Charles, when he was old enough to put this advice to the test, was too strongly inclined to regard it as infallible and to forget that there are occasions when grace of manner poorly repays a man for his services, nevertheless, his popularity with all sorts and conditions of people - particularly his most amiable subjects - owed much to his affability and to the ease with which he would greet a stranger. But Newcastle made one reservation : "I lose your dignity and sett by your state, I do not advise you to that, but the contrary : for it preserves you Kings more than ceremony ? cloth of estates, the distance people are with great officers, heralds, drums, trumpeteers, coaches, rich furniture for horses, guards, heraldic men making room, disorders to be cured by their staff of office, and the crie 'Now the King comes.' . . ."

But the distance between Charles and the crowd was very rarely wide enough to prevent "a chat or a smile," so that his dignity was always being jeopardised by his taste for keeping on good terms with everybody. It was the old ideal of the king as a kind of divinity that Newcastle, though he recommended an occasional condescension, could never wholly abandon — an ideal which was to be profoundly modified by future events.

After three years of office, this wise nobleman was superseded by the aged and futile Marquis of Hertford, who procured the Earl of Berkshire, an equally foolish person, to assist him with the tasks which neither was competent to perform. But by this time Charles, although only twelve years old, seems to have been able to look after himself. In May 1642, after the outbreak of the first Civil War, he was made Captain of the Prince of Wales's Own, and shortly afterwards, with his younger brother James, was allowed to witness at a safe distance the indecisive action of his father's troops at the battle of Edgehill.

During the critical years of the struggle between the King and Parliament, while the autocracy of his father was rapidly becoming more and more oppressive, Charles began that life of wandering which was to continue for seventeen years, until

he was restored to London and to the people whose representatives were now planning his father's death and his own exile. They were years of hardship which, though lightly borne, left a permanent mark on his character, and were, in truth, an ill preparation for the exacting task of kingship.

Thus for three years, as nominal commander-in-chief of the entire Royalist army, he drifted through the West Country, trying to rally support to the Crown, though knowing well enough that any resistance he could offer would be made in vain. Early in the year 1646 he was driven by the Parliamentary forces to his last stronghold on English soil – Pendennis Castle. Here, with a handful of followers, he remained for a few weeks, until it was obvious that if he delayed his flight any longer he would be taken prisoner, and so hasten his father's ruin. For already there was a design on foot to kidnap him, and Charles I, foreseeing this, had begged him repeatedly to leave the country before it was too late. Finally, on the 2nd of March, he was thrust out of England, and by good fortune reached the Scilly Isles. The sea, he then discovered and was never to forget, was a sovereign remedy for despair. The pleasures of navigation, the boat riding the long Atlantic rollers, the sting of spray – such

things, he found, could blot out the memory of months of dreary marching and counter-marching, of the setting up and taking down of standards. They became at once, and were to remain, the one genuine passion of his life. But in his present plight they could not take the place of food, and, since there was nothing in these barren islands for him and his meagre household to eat, he was once again driven forth. Jersey, however, was loyal, and welcomed the fugitives some weeks later at Elizabeth Castle.

In this safe retreat, Charles – though doubtless he would have been happy all day with his boat – could reflect, for the first time in many months, on the wretchedness of his position. Happily, he was too young to perceive how critical it was, and his natural predisposition to put off care was surely pardonable at a time when most boys have no conception of the responsibilities which life inflicts, and which they will one day be called upon to bear. For a while, then, he played alone, as a child in a world of his own invention, until his mother called him out of his dreams to face reality.

Henrietta Maria, a daughter of Henri IV of France, was a stern, intriguing woman, whose sympathies belonged more to her own country than to that to which she had been called by marriage. Already she was established with her

Court at Saint Germain, and thither she summoned her eldest child. It was a turning-point in the boy's life. The wisest of his counsellors, Edward Hyde, foresaw the danger of his obeying, and urgently advised his master that a Prince of Wales's first duty belongs to his country, not to his parents. For, once in France, Charles would be compelled by necessity to accept charity from the French Court ; and the French Court, it was clear, would not break off relations with the English Parliament in order to support him. Besides, his mother being a Catholic, he would most probably be persuaded by her to join a Church which would disable him for ever from becoming King. Charles listened — he was always a ready listener — to Hyde's warning, and then went his own way — the way that led to Saint Germain. It was his first contact with France, the beginning of an obligation from which he never escaped. Towards the end of June he was in Paris.

It would be hard to imagine more irksome and unsuitable surroundings for an active youth of sixteen than the French Court at this period. After four years of not very serious campaigning, he had lost, if he had ever possessed, the manners of a courtier. In this strange new company, his uncouthness was immediately remarked upon.

Still, his arrival was an event ; he appeared, at any rate to Madame de Motteville, " very well made. His swarthy complexion," she wrote in her memoirs, " agreed well with his large, bright eyes ; his mouth was exceedingly ugly, his figure," she added, " extremely fine." But his habits were terribly unrefined. When his mother tried to push him into the arms of Mademoiselle de Montpensier – the noblest lady in the kingdom – he had no conception of the part she expected him to play. He ate grossly and no words came to his lips. Some motions of affection seem to have stirred within him, but, since the art of expressing them was beyond him, this first attempt at wooing was a pathetic failure. At that time and in that place, he might have learned the one thing Newcastle had omitted from his instructions – the art of love. Perhaps he was, though in so many other ways precocious, too young as yet to care ; or it was not, perhaps, in his nature to feel more than physical desire. But could he have foretold the future, he might then have foresworn all women for ever. As it was, in the unfamiliar surroundings in which he found himself, the performance of this new duty prescribed by his mother was as good a pastime as any, except sailing, for which there was now no opportunity.

It was not long, however, before he began to feel, as many children do at his age, the importunity of parents. And he realised then that it was time for him to act on his own initiative, before he became irrevocably entangled in his mother's apron-strings. Therefore, without positively disobeying her, as he had disobeyed Hyde before he came to France, he excused himself suddenly by going off on an excursion to his sister Mary — who was married to the Prince of Orange — and so changed the stifling atmosphere of the French Court for the free air of Holland.

There he was joined once more by the faithful Hyde, and for some months, freed from the restraint of his mother's presence, he enjoyed a certain liberty. During his visit he became involved in an affair very different from the chaste flirtation with Mademoiselle de Montpensier. What a small matter it must have seemed to him at the time — that mean *amour* with Lucy Walters, a poor Welsh woman who died miserably some nine years later in Paris ; yet how vast in its consequences was the legacy she left behind her. The offspring of this intrigue — the child whom he afterwards created Duke of Monmouth — was to haunt and trouble him to the end of his days.

Meanwhile, the disastrous state of affairs in England began to force itself on his attention, for it was reported that his father, a prisoner of Parliament, had lost everything except his life ; and that, too, he was perilously near losing. In vain the young Prince made a half-hearted attempt to destroy some shipping at the mouth of the Thames, where everything was in the utmost disorder and the fleet in mutiny. Quarrelling with his captains, he sailed aimlessly along the French coast, hoping that something might happen to avert the imminent danger, something – a naval victory, perhaps – which would settle everything. But the opportunity had passed. His delight in the sea, now perfectly satisfied, blinded him to the need for organising and disciplining his ragged followers. In November of this year – 1648 – the Parliamentary army demanded the King's life. Charles appealed to his father's judges, but to no purpose ; the tide of revenge was at the full, and beyond his or any man's control. On the 30th of January of the New Year – one of the coldest and saddest mornings in English history – Charles I was beheaded at the window of his own palace of Whitehall.



"So ended," Hyde afterwards wrote in his retirement, "a year of reproach and infamy above all years which had passed before it; a year of the highest dissimulation and hypocrisy, of the deepest villainy and most bloody treasons, that any nation was cursed with or under." When this terrible and unnatural crime was committed, the Prince of Wales was at the Hague, and the news of it added to the despair that neither Dutch hospitality nor youthful amusements could wholly disguise. "Within two or three days, the States presented themselves in a body to condole with him for the murder of his father, in terms of great sorrow"; and the clergy, also, came to him with a Latin oration to perform the same office.

The situation, however, was too grave for prolonged mourning, and some plan of action had to be drawn up. For already the Queen-mother was demanding her son's presence in Paris, while his counsellors, on the other hand, were scheming for an invasion of England through either Scotland or Ireland. Charles, having so recently thrown off his mother's influence, naturally had no desire to fall under it again so soon. Nevertheless, he saw himself bound to submit sooner or later, for money was short and he could not live indefinitely on the

very generous charity of his brother-in-law. And for the moment, at any rate, everything seemed indefinite.

As soon as possible, therefore, it was arranged that he should set out for Ireland, where he was assured of loyal support, and with this end in view he left the Hague and re-entered France by way of Breda and Brussels. By this time his mother was in a high state of displeasure at his dilatoriness, though the truth was, of course, that while "she could not justly dislike any resolution he had taken nor could imagine whither he should go but into Ireland, she was exceedingly displeased that any resolution at all had been taken before she was consulted." "She was angry," Hyde remarked — and Hyde was then, and was to continue to be, the chief victim of her resentment — "that the counsellors were chosen without her directions, and looked upon all that had been done, as done in order to exclude her from meddling in the affairs." This, indeed, happened to be the truth ; and Charles, when he reached Paris, told her plainly to mind her own business, as he, for his part, was going to mind his without her help. Thereafter, he was forced to avoid her company except on formal occasions ; and, as time went on, he was to show increasingly the will to stand and to act alone. He had, in fact,

beaten his mother, as later he would beat all his Ministers, at her own game.

In Ireland and Scotland, meanwhile, he had been proclaimed King, but the prospect in those days of an early restoration to the English throne must have seemed, and indeed was, exceedingly remote. Penury at first, then Cromwell shattered his hopes in Ireland, and the projected invasion from that quarter ended feebly at Jersey in the early autumn. Charles, unable to come to any decision, lingered there for some months, until the fearful proximity of Cromwell's navy at Portsmouth impressed on him that his only chance was to accept the invitation of the Duke of Argyll and the Covenanters to go into Scotland ; an invitation which, it was pointed out, would probably not be repeated for ever. So, at the beginning of the next year — 1650 — he passed once again through France, meeting his mother on the road at Beauvais, and agreed to join the Scotch Commissioners at Breda, "the States," it was reported, "having no mind that he should come any more to the Hague."

He was now very awkwardly cornered, since, by undertaking to treat with these representatives of the Presbyterian Kirk — "a generation of very hypocrites and vipers" — he was flinging himself on the mercy of a party of fanatics who, knowing

perfectly well that Scotland was his last hope, could make their own conditions before allowing him to set foot in their country. Charles, who craved an immediate solution to his difficulties, was thus faced with no alternative but to accept their proposals, and in so doing to let himself in for a course of deceit which involved, incidentally, the betrayal of one of the bravest and most loyal of his subjects – James Graham, Marquis of Montrose.

The chief condition demanded of him was his acceptance of the solemn League and Covenant, whereby he undertook to establish Presbyterianism in England. Now, only the most uncompromising zealot could have conceived the possibility of promoting an end so monstrous and insufferable to the English people. But Montrose perceived the dangerous and perhaps fatal consequences that would ensue were Charles to attempt such a thing, and the risk he would run of forfeiting for ever his chance of regaining the crown. Charles, therefore, had prudently supported him. The invitation of the Covenanters, however, seemed to hold out such promise of a speedy restoration that, without a thought, he deserted Montrose. Such callousness, it may be remarked, was to become more frequent in the future.

So Montrose died on the scaffold above the hysterical rejoicings of religious maniacs, and Charles, gaily perjuring himself and freely promising to undertake things that he knew would never be done, agreed to the terms of the Commissioners in the spring, and, having taken the Covenant in the Moray Firth, was permitted to land in Scotland towards the end of June.

Though nominally King, he was in fact Argyll's prisoner. His Court was carefully "purged" of "all profane, scandalous, malignant [i.e. royalist], and disaffected persons" – that is to say, of almost everyone with any intelligence and personal charm – and his days were divided between "fasts," "humiliations," and repeated asseverances that only the fulfilment of the Covenant would bring peace to a wicked world. The effect of all this, and of the constant spying and interference, the endless sermons and the specious groans of self-righteous congregations, was to confirm him in the course of hypocrisy begun at Breda. Pleasure-loving by nature, he now found himself deprived of all recreation but an occasional round of golf; even to listen to the music of stringed instruments was a sin, and most women, in the eyes of the Covenanters, were whores. In this deplorable and depressed condition, Charles, unable to trust anybody and

with no one at hand whom he could love, was driven deeper and deeper into himself. The habits of mind which were forced upon him then were to influence his conduct for many years to come.

Cromwell's victory over the Covenanters at Dunbar on the 3rd of September, 1650, by causing a split in the Kirk party, revived the little flame of hope still flickering in Charles's heart. While the General Assembly were drawing up thirteen impossible reasons of divine displeasure, and attributing the defeat to "a profane guard of King's Horse, which was suffered to fight in the Army" — the only section of it that had shown any courage — Charles was planning an escape to the Highlands, where Lord Huntly was in active opposition to Argyll. In October he set out improvidently, with no luggage but a couple of prayer-books and a manuscript of Euclid ; but "The Start," as it came to be called, was premature, and he was brought back ignominiously to Perth.

Once again hypocrisy was his readiest weapon of defence, and he insincerely repented his attempted evasion. Christmas was spent in the deepest gloom, enlivened by unwholesome fasts and endless sermons, preparatory to his coronation, which was celebrated at Scone on January

rst, when the Oath of the Covenant was officially renewed.

The flame of hope, though temporarily dimmed, began to burn more steadily. Scotland, by this time, was divided between four rival armies, variously supporting the King or Covenant, or both or neither. Charles, now "active and intelligent," saw his opportunity, and moved quietly from place to place enlisting an army of his own - "English, Scots, Lowlanders, Highlanders, Covenanters, anti-Covenanters, Malignants, Presbyterians, Resolutioners, Protesters" - a strange mixture, but still an army. In May, this royal circus gathered at Stirling, and there, to the rattle of arms and the tramp of feet, Charles came of age. On the last day of July this extraordinary rabble moved southwards; six days later it swarmed into Carlisle, where, amid much celebration, a certain Mr. Jackson, created King-at-Arms for the event, proclaimed Charles King of England on English soil.

"All the rogues have left us, I shall not say whether for fear or disloyalty," wrote the Duke of Hamilton from Penrith; "but all now with His Majesty are such as will not dispute his commands." Over the lonely moors about Appleby the enthusiasm of the troops began to flag. The bridge across the Mersey at Warrington

had been destroyed, and news came through of Cromwell's rapid approach from the north-east. On the 22nd of August the Royal army, swelled by some three hundred men recruited by the loyal Earl of Derby, entered the faithful city of Worcester.

Hyde, who had stood firmly at his master's side in Scotland, would remember when he was an old man the utter exhaustion of the army on its arrival. "The want," he observed, "was very apparent and grievous. Never had so many hundred miles been marched in so few days, and with so little rest." That little flame of hope which had flared for a moment now burned low. No fresh reinforcements were made in the city, and yet each day brought Cromwell a stage nearer. By the beginning of September he had invested the city, and on the third of the month — the anniversary of his victory at Dunbar — he passed through its gates in perfect order of battle.

When the alarm was sounded, the King was eating a frugal mid-day meal. The fearful tidings spread instantly through the crowded streets. "There was paleness in every man's looks, and jealousy and confusion in their faces." Charles heard them and betrayed no emotion. Though he fought desperately throughout the afternoon, he knew that no plan of action would

save him, and so, at about six o'clock in the evening, he gave orders that none should attend on him but his closest friends, and, calling for his horse, he escaped into the open country.

The amazing adventures of the next forty days and nights have been told so many times that there is no need to repeat them here. But few stories in recorded history contain such noble evidence of confidence and courage on the part of a king, and of entire loyalty and devotion on the part of a few men and women. For, after his flight from Worcester, Charles was absolutely at the mercy of those from whom he begged food and shelter. A prize of a thousand pounds had been set on his head, and, though that head had been shorn of its Cavalier locks, and its features rudely disguised to conform with the general appearance of a humble serving-man, it was surely a miracle that during all that time he was only recognised by those who loved him ; that, after wandering through ten counties, suffering every privation, and running each day almost incredible risks of discovery, he finally reached Shoreham, in Sussex, on the morning of the 15th of October, and so passed safely over into France.



Charles, in the company of Lord Wilmot — a stubborn old Cavalier and father of his master's future friend, the wild and incorrigible Earl of Rochester — arrived in Paris at the end of October. The bearded young man who then greeted his mother at the Louvre was very different from the petulant youth who had left her at Beauvais two years before. Defeat and hardship had finally disillusioned him ; he was a king without a throne, a prince without a penny to his name. But in the process he had become a man, having learned in this hard school more of life than is commonly to be found in Courts. Even Mademoiselle de Montpensier noticed and could not help admiring the improvement in his appearance and manners. For he was no more the callow young savage she had once known, who had been so reluctant in his advances to her. She could even listen to the dreary tale of his sufferings in Scotland with sympathy that might almost pass for love. But the days of love-making were over ; Charles had lost interest, and she, in truth, was too great a match for a poor, unshaven exile.

Indeed, France had no desire to shelter him longer than was humanely necessary. For Cromwell's power, now aimed at the destruction of Holland's commercial supremacy, had become the terror and respect of all Europe, and at any

moment the artful, spiteful, "juggling" Cardinal Mazarin might decide to hand over his unwanted guest to the English Parliament. Six months went by and Charles managed to subsist somehow on the charity of friends, until his "insupportable necessities grew so notorious that the French Court were compelled to take notice of them," and to grant him a small pension, the first instalment of which was entirely consumed in repaying his mother for her meagre hospitality. He now began to touch for the first time the depths of poverty, and, when winter came, Hyde, who had rejoined his master, could write: "I am so cold, I can scarce hold my pen, and have not three *sous* to buy a faggot."

It is hardly surprising, therefore, if in this miserable state he indulged himself largely in whatever pleasures came his way, or were put in it by the eager, pimping hands of his young friend, the Duke of Buckingham. With his help, and encouraged by other French noblemen, he soon acquired that taste for frivolous amusement which was to be so severely and sometimes unjustly criticised after his restoration. Hyde, indeed, thinking perhaps of the late King's exemplary life and not a little proud of his own, remonstrated with Charles, telling him very frankly that he was too preoccupied with his own

ease and was making far too little effort to improve his position – advice for which he was duly thanked and duly forgiven, but which, it is hardly necessary to add, was quickly forgotten.

Another, and potentially a deeper cause for misgiving amongst the King's advisers at this time, was his attitude towards religion. It is not easy to realise now how much a man's, and still more a king's, faith mattered then. If, for instance, Charles had become a Roman Catholic, he would have had France and Spain – the strongest powers in western Europe – to support him. But, by going over to Rome, he would have closed, possibly for ever, the path to the English throne. At this juncture when, as we have seen, he was faced with penury and had nowhere to lay his head, the temptation to do so must have been acute. Moreover, his mother and his sister Henrietta, of whom he was passionately fond, were both good Catholics, and would most willingly have drawn him over to their side. Again, as Halifax was afterwards to remark : “The ill-bred familiarity of the Scotch Divines had given him a distaste of that part of the Protestant religion. He was left then to the little Remnant of the Church of England in the Fauxbourg St. Germain ; which made such a kind of figure, as might easily be turn'd in such a manner

is to make him lose his veneration for it. In a refined Country where Religion appeared in pomp and Splendour, the outward appearance of such unfashionable Men was made an argument against their Religion." This may seem a feeble reason, but in the circumstances it was one that must have appealed very strongly to Charles. "or the rest, he was in no hurry to come to an immediate decision ; " a General Creed, and no very long one, may be presumed to be the utmost religion of one, whose Age and Inclination could not well spare any thoughts that did not tend to his Pleasures." Yet we may be sure that he began then to estimate the material advantage of religion which would bring with it the support of France, and to foresee how necessary and how valuable it might be when, if ever, he became King. For the time being, however, he concealed his thoughts and wisely kept all these things in his heart.

For nearly three years Charles lived on his altry allowance with his mother and her family

Paris ; but such was his poverty that he was reduced to selling the brass from the cannon of his cousin Prince Rupert's ships, and finally to sending Wilmot to Ratisbon to beg money from the Diet then in session there. " When all is done," he wrote, with a semblance of gaiety,

“ and we have lamented and advised as we ought to do, we must to others make the best of it, and put all fair *glosses* and interpretations of innocent mirth upon it.”

His patience in adversity was temporarily rewarded by the promise of a small grant from the German Diet. This – but chiefly the increasing unfriendliness of the French Court, which dared not offend Cromwell, now Protector, and victorious in his naval campaign against the Dutch – persuaded Charles to leave Paris. As he left, he sent word over to his friends in England that “ they should live quietly, without making any desperate or unreasonable attempts, or giving advantage to those who watched them, to put them into prison, and to ruin their estates and families.”

In this message, he expressed the wisdom he had learned from his rash march out of Scotland and his defeat at Worcester : that kings are restored, not by lucky skirmishes but by the suffrage of the people, that in the fullness of time, not on the spur of the moment, the tide changes and sweeps towards the shore.

According to Hyde, the King, “ in the pinching straits of his condition, enjoyed very much ease from the time he left Paris,” largely owing to the good husbandry of an excellent and careful

eeper of the Privy Purse. His headquarters for the next year or so were fixed at Cologne, and from this place he made various expeditions to his sister, the Princess of Orange, now a widow, to the Spa, and to the Duke of Newburgh at Tüsseldorf. Once more he was master in his own house, and when he learned that, in his absence, his mother had been secretly working to convert his young brother, the Duke of Gloucester, he instantly asserted himself and the child as commanded to join him. Such an incident apart, it was a period of inactivity during which his Court, with no better course to pursue, became exceedingly frivolous. Hyde, clutching at a straw . this stream of pleasure, affirms that his young master " betook himself with great cheerfulness to compose his mind to his fortune, and with a marvellous contentedness, prescribed so many hours in the day to his retirement in his closet ; which he employed in reading and studying both the Italian and the French languages ; and, at other times, walked much upon the walls of the town . . . and sometimes rid into the fields ; and, in the whole, spent his time very well."

There is no reason to doubt that Charles, when he wished, could devote himself to more sober occupations than dancing and picnicking ; if anything, his interest in the former increased

with age, and it is a mistake to suppose – as many have – that ~~He~~ possessed no serious inclinations. But it is certainly doubtful whether he was capable of continuous application in his studies. He was easily bored, nor was it natural for him, surrounded by so many pleasant and unpleasant distractions, to endure the seclusion of his closet for any length of time. Many years later, Halifax remarked that “he had but little Reading, and that tending to his pleasures more than to his Instruction. In the library of a young Prince,” he added, “the solemn Folios are not much rumpled, Books of lighter Digestion have the Dog’s Ears.” And Sheffield confirms this when he says “that his Understanding was quick and lively in little things, and sometimes would soar high enough in great ones ; but unable to keep it up with any long Attention or Application.” Health, however, was the one thing to which he never failed to attend. His constitution was superb, and survived excesses that would have brought a weaker man to an early grave. “It had an intire Preference to anything else in his Thoughts, and he might be said without Agravation to have studied it with as little Intermission as any Man in the World.” At Cologne, as we have seen, “he walked much” ; it was his favourite form of exercise, and, indeed, the

earest and most characteristic impression of him after he became King is not in the arms of his mistresses, but striding rapidly down the Mall across St. James's Park, or away from London, on the heath at Newmarket and over the down to Royston — his watch in hand, his spaniels at his heels, and his Ministers and companions waiting in the rear.

At Bruges, where his Court settled next, having successfully paid for its two years' residence at Cologne, Charles, who still clung to the idea of finding foreign support for his restoration, signed in the spring of 1657 a treaty with Spain, then at war with Cromwell. In November of the same year he was formally excluded by Act of Parliament from the English throne. Two years earlier, his hopes had been raised for a moment by rumours of a Cavalier rising at Salisbury, and he had moved expectantly to the coast. "Without doubt," reflected Hyde, "it was a bold enterprise, and might have produced wonderful effects, if it had been prosecuted with the same resolution or the same rashness, it was entered into." It failed, as the earlier invasion from Scotland had failed, from lack of proper organisation, and with it perished the King's hopes for the next three years.

From time to time, still "contending with the

rigour of his fortune with great temper and magnanimity" Charles dispatched spies to England. By the beginning of the year 1658 the news they brought appeared more favourable. From many young Cavaliers in London, now become apprentices, they had been able to gauge the temper of the City. Towards the end of February, Charles – now supported by Spain – moved to Brussels and spent the spring and summer months wandering incognito through the Low Countries. And so indeed he might have wandered, an exile, for ever. August passed, and the golden month of September opened and renewed the memory of two great defeats. On the seventh anniversary of the battle of Worcester, while a great storm and tempest raged and superstitious men wondered what such things could portend, Cromwell unexpectedly died, and, by dying, removed the chief opposition to Charles's restoration.

Not until the following spring, however, was he able to make a tentative move. Concealing his identity, he re-entered France and quietly investigated the advantages of her Channel ports, while his brother James, the Duke of York, held himself in readiness at Boulogne. Yet again their rising hopes were to be dashed by the miscarriage, at Nantwich in August, of Sir George Booth's

emature attempt to raise a Royalist rebellion in England. In return, Fortune smiled feebly on the King's despair. For, France having decided to make peace with Spain, Charles, with hopes of benefiting from this alliance, decided to follow the plenipotentiaries southward to the Pyrenees. Accordingly, he set off with the faithful Marquis of Ormonde and Lord Bristol, who came separated from them, lost his way, and finally arrived at Fuenterabia after the Treaty had been signed. Thus ended a wild-goose chase, during which he had begged and been denied the hand of the fairest of Mazarin's healthy nieces – Hortense Mancini, the future Duchess Mazarin – and from which he returned with just enough money, grudgingly provided by Don Lewis de Haro, the Spanish signatory, to pay for his travelling expenses. But "the pleasure and variety of his journey, and the very ill treatment he had received from Don Lewis, though the good disposition he had left the Queen-mother in, had very much revived his spirit, and the joy for his return dispersed the present doubts."

He returned to Brussels by way of Paris, only to find his little Court plunged in gloom and profoundly sceptical. Indeed, the Duke of York spared so far as to negotiate for a commission

in the Spanish Navy. In this dispirited company, Charles alone seems to have been confident of ultimate success, and for political reasons he reaffirmed his Protestantism in the face of offers from Catholic Powers to effect his restoration.

England, under the rule of "Tumble-down Dick," the late Protector's son, had fallen into a state of unparalleled confusion. The country was virtually governed by a military dictatorship — a system above all others repugnant to a people who detested any form of tyranny. Such a night of anarchy could not last ; the dawn of a new age was about to break. From Scotland came tidings of General Monck's projected march on London. Tired eyes in England and in Holland watched bravely for the first streamers of light across the Border. "There remained within the King's breast," Hyde wrote, "some faint hope (and God knows how faint) that Monck's march into England might yet produce some alteration."

Monck, however, waiting until success was certain, artfully concealed his intention of supporting the King, for it is certain that "if he had declared his resolution sooner, he had been destroyed himself." On reaching the capital, he passed in triumph through the City and Westminster and lodged himself in the empty and desolate palace of Whitehall. Meanwhile, the

vs of his arrival threw the King into a fit of
er despair ; it was, or at least it seemed to him,
also dawn, and he resigned Himself to the
spect of eternal banishment.

Iappily – for the truth was still hidden from
– his fears were groundless. In London, had
known it, the clangour of church bells floated
oss the Thames to the astonished citizens of
nbeth, and the air trembled with suppressed
itement. The dawn had indeed come at
. Still ignorant of what had happened, he
advised to move to Breda ; and thither he
ie on the 4th of April in the year 1660.

t first, the people expressed a natural fear
Charles, unwilling to forgive his father's
th and the great injuries done to himself,
ht seek revenge. But they were quickly
sured by the declaration of the Royalist party
: “as the General [Monck] had not chosen
sandy foundations of self-government, but
firm rock of national interest, whereon to
ie a settlement, so it was their hope and
ver that, when the building should be come to
aised . . . that all mention of parties and
ions, and all rancour and animosities might
hrown in, and buried, like rubbish, under its
.dation.” And before long Charles, carefully
npted by Hyde, issued to the Army, the Navy,

the Lords and Commons, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen "and Common Council of our City of London" his own declaration from Breda promising therein liberty to tender consciences pardon to all who should proclaim their allegiance within forty days, and settlement by Parliament of Crown and other property confiscated during the Commonwealth ; concluding with the general hope " that the memory of what is past may be buried to the world."

On the 25th of April the Long Parliament was dissolved by Monck, and the Convention Parliament, elected in its place, replied with joy and thanksgiving to the royal ultimatum. On the 8th of May the formal proclamation of accession was read, according to ancient custom, at Westminster, at Whitehall, and at Temple Bar.

Charles, meanwhile, having directed the Duke of York to take command of the Fleet, left Breda for the Hague by yacht. There, where half the world seemed gathered in a mood of frenzied enthusiasm, he was welcomed by deputies bearing gifts from both Houses, and, to crown his triumph, by a mission of Presbyterian divines. For over a week, by day and night, while messages of loyal greeting poured in, these entertainments continued until the Fleet was ready ; and then, on

the 24th of May, as the *Royal Charles* set its course for Dover, the last stage of the Restoration began. Two days later, in the early morning, it anchored with its precious burden in the roads beneath the cliffs of England.

* * * * *

It had been a mad crossing – flags flying, guns firing wildly, men falling overboard in the excess of their joy, amid the incessant clamour of happy voices. Such a thing had never happened before – would never happen again. For a moment it was good to forget all that had passed, and better still to be able to ignore what lay ahead. Nor is it surprising that, after this overwhelming reception, Charles is said to have turned with a smile to one of his company, saying, “he doubted it had been his own fault he had been absent so long, for he saw nobody that did not protest he had ever wished for his return.”

Along the road to London, by way of Canterbury, the country folk roared out a welcome, while some, more bold, seized the opportunity of laying their own petty claims to title and estate before the harassed and rather weary monarch. In three days from its triumphal disembarkation

at Dover the royal procession entered the capita from the south-east. "This day - the 29th of May" - John Evelyn wrote in his dairy, "his Majesty Charles the Second came to London after a sad and long exile and calamitous suffering both of the King and the Church, being seventeen years. This was also his birth-day, and with a triumph of above 20,000 horse and foot, brandishing their swords, and shouting with inexpressible joy ; the ways strewed with flowers, the bells ringing, the streets hung with tapestry, fountains running with wine ; the Mayor, Aldermen, and all the Companies, in their liveries, chains of gold, and banners ; Lords and Nobles, clad in cloth of silver, gold, and velvet : the windows and balconies, all set with ladies : trumpets, music, and myriads of people flocking even so far as from Rochester, so as they were seven hours in passing the city, even from two in the afternoon till nine at night.

"I stood in the Strand and beheld it, and blessed God. And all this was done without one drop of blood shed, and by that very army which rebelled against him ; but it was the Lord's doing, for such a Restoration was never mentioned in any history, ancient or modern, since the return of the Jews from their Babylonish captivity ; nor so joyful a day and so bright ever seen in this

nation, this happening when to expect or effect it was past all human policy."

So the long day ended, and the King, putting aside his state, retired to the apartments in Whitehall which he had not seen for over twenty years ; and with him went "the Lady," as Hyde would always call her, who was afterwards raised to be Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland, the beautiful mistress he had found in Holland, whose daily doings – even her lawn petticoats drying in the Privy Garden – were to be a source of constant delight to men like Samuel Pepys. The significance of the opening night of his reign will not escape those who regard Charles II rather as "a merry monarch" than as a king. The historian, pausing for a moment in sympathy, as the candles burn low and the streets about the palace grow quiet save for the watchman's tread, must pass on to graver and less happy affairs.

Outwardly, the England to which Charles was restored had not changed. London was still the same ill-planned, ill-paved town of twenty years before ; Whitehall still, as a French traveller noted, "a heap of houses, erected at divers times, and of different models," washed by the sluggish Thames. Under Cromwell, it is true, the rich furniture of the palace had been sequestrated or

sold, but much of it had been bought by faithful Cavaliers and was now gladly returned to its proper place. Inwardly, however, the country had altered profoundly. The nation, though its pulse had been quickened by the joyful Restoration and the subsequent splendour of a coronation, and its senses extraordinarily revived by such scenes after years of Puritan restriction, when even the theatres were closed and beauty itself made abhorrent, soon regained its normal composure. Hyde, who all this time had worked incessantly for the restoration of monarchy and was at last, though only for a few years, to enjoy his reward, observed in his memoirs of this period that "a general Despondency seemed to possess the Minds of Men, as if they little cared what came to pass," giving as his opinion that "it did not proceed so much from Malice, as from Disease of murmuring, which had been contracting above Twenty Years, and become almost incorporated into the Nature of the Nation."

While men grumbled, as men always will in times of political and social change, Cromwell had effected much. He had aroused the national consciousness and, while he lived, consolidated his victories at home and abroad. But, men's memories being short, his achievements were soon forgotten in the confusion that lasted from his

death until the Restoration. At the King's return, there can have been only one question on the lips of thoughtful men : "What will happen next?" For the old order was passing away insensibly and a new one taking its place. In every department of life the evolution of thought and sensibility was apparent. The old scale of values in science, philosophy, morality, politics and literature was undergoing a drastic revision ; as the century draws to its close, the break with the old traditions becomes more and more obvious in the work of such men as Hobbes, Newton, Locke, Dryden, Wren, and their less illustrious disciples. It was an intensely critical age — satire and invective are its natural predilections : it was also an intensely unhappy one, for habits do not keep pace with ideas and most men are conservative at heart.

No king ever ascended his throne with greater burdens to bear and with less inclination and knowledge of how to bear them than Charles II. In exile, he had shown the most exemplary fortitude in circumstances which no other king has ever been called upon to endure, but his sufferings then were not greater, were indeed less, than many men have borne without complaint. His laxity after his return has often been excused on the grounds that, as he loved much, much, therefore,

must be forgiven him. Yet the cause does not lie with his mistresses, to whom he gave no more of his time than any vigorous man would with equal opportunity, but with the habit of irresponsibility he had formed in his wanderings, which confirmed him in his natural disinclination to make an effort or to come to a decision. “ He loved ease and quiet ” ; and with this “ had so natural an Aversion to all Formality, that with as much Wit as most Men ever had, and as Majestic a Mien, yet he could not, on Premeditation, act the Part of a King for a Moment, either in Parliament, or in Council, either in Words or Gesture ; which carried him into the other Extream . . . of letting all Distinction and Ceremony fall to the Ground, as useless and foppish.”

For the first seven years of his reign, therefore, he relegated most of the responsibility of government to his Lord Chancellor, Hyde, whom he had rewarded with the earldom of Clarendon. He could hardly have done otherwise, seeing that Hyde, by virtue of his age and experience, had been his best counsellor for twenty years. But the Chancellor belonged to an older and outworn generation, and he was soon to find that a youthful, irresponsible Court had no consideration for his years and little respect for his wisdom. “ The King,” he lamented, “ had in his Nature so little

Reverence or Esteem for Antiquity, and did in Truth so much contemn old Orders, Forms and Institutions, that the Objections of Novelty rather advanced than obstructed any Proposition." It is remarkable that he remained in power as long as he did ; his stubbornness saved him, after his integrity and even his physical peculiarities had become the laughing-stock of such buffoons and mimics as the Duke of Buckingham. As he grew older and more infirm from the gout, the King would still visit and confer with him in his own house. In the end, almost any excuse would have served for his dismissal, and at least three were found — the sale of Dunkirk, the King's marriage, and the Duke of York's.

Dunkirk — "the constant Charge and Expense whereof amounted to above one hundred and twenty thousand Pounds yearly" — was a continuous drain on an impoverished Treasury, and its value as a base was out of all proportion to the cost of its upkeep. Hyde, therefore, recommended its sale ; the garrison was withdrawn, and at the end of the year 1662 the town was handed over to France for the unprecedented sum of half a million French *pistoles*. Later, when popular feeling began to turn against France, he was basely accused of peculation, and the great mansion he was building at the top of St. James's

Street – Dunkirk House, as the libellers called it – was cited as evidence of his share in the deal.

The King's marriage – a purely political contract – was a more perilous negotiation. Suitable matches were scarce ; the richest prizes – and Charles wanted the richest he could get – had already been snapped up when, after the Restoration, it was his duty to beget a legitimate heir. The best offer Hyde could procure came from Portugal, which undertook to provide an Infanta, a dowry in money, and the territories of Tangier and Bombay. In the circumstances, it was sufficient, although it involved a Catholic alliance. The future alone would reveal its tragic inadequacy, when the Queen failed to fulfil her side of the contract. Hyde, with all his faults and much greater qualities, could not have foretold her sterility, but he was to be bitterly blamed for his share in bringing the Infanta Catherine of Braganza over into England.

If the consequences of this marriage, which was celebrated on the 20th of May, 1662, afterwards affected the peace of the whole nation, the revelation of the Duke of York's intrigue with the Chancellor's daughter at Breda, his secret marriage, and the birth of a child who was to be Queen of England, hastened her father's ruin. No man in his lonely and exalted station could have

survived for long the wrath of those who were bent upon destroying him, and the imputation that he had accepted money from a Catholic power, imported a Catholic Queen into a Protestant country, and married his daughter to the heir-presumptive.

Nevertheless, in the early part of his reign Charles could not do without him ; he knew it, and so did Hyde. For the experience of foreign Courts and foreign rulers had taught Charles little of any value for the special task before him, unless it was that no man can be trusted, and that compromise and procrastination are convenient ways of averting crises. A king, he soon discovered, is only a controlling force in the elaborate mechanism of the State. The machine had run for twenty years without him and it was still running when he came back to it ; it was not in his power to stop or seriously to alter its movement. His Restoration, in fact, had not interrupted the continuity of domestic and foreign affairs. In the beginning, therefore, he left everything to the Chancellor and coldly supported his administration, though he was growing steadily to regard him as an encumbrance and a bore.

But although Charles looked forward to a time when he would govern without let or hindrance, he knew that such an ambition could neither be

pursued nor fulfilled without the disposal of immense sums of money. The methods he employed to obtain it were responsible for most of the troubles he created and the mistakes he made ; and they were, incidentally, decisive factors in the development of his character.

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If the scarcity of money had hampered Charles during his wanderings, it haunted him incessantly after his return. So long as it had been simply a matter of foregoing expensive pleasures and postponing indefinitely the salaries of his servants and officers, poverty was uncomfortable but could be endured. It was another matter altogether when he became King. A thousand new obligations and charges sprang up then, and, because he was King, it was taken for granted that he would meet every one of them in full. The pleasing though petty gifts he had received at Breda were insufficient even to pay off arrears in his own household. Later, the Convention Parliament settled on him an income of £1,200,000, which, it need hardly be said, was never paid up in full.

He has been accused, often with more acrimony than the facts admit, of lavishing vast sums upon

his private pleasures. Without a doubt, as a glance through his personal accounts will show, his mistresses and confidential servants were inordinately grasping ; but they received, in proportion, not more perhaps than they deserved. They were expensive, certainly, but their upkeep – to put it crudely – was nothing compared to that of the army and navy. The latter were then by far the heaviest tax on the Exchequer, and most of the difficulties and a great deal of the popular discontent at the beginning of the reign can be traced to this cause. Indeed, it may be said that the maintenance of a navy for safeguarding the commercial welfare of a country largely dependent for its revenue on foreign trade was the King's chief care. How deeply he felt this responsibility is revealed in the diary and correspondence of Samuel Pepys, one of the ablest of his Civil Servants.

The naval victories during the first Dutch War had splendidly justified Cromwell's reforms in the administration, but after his death, during the Interregnum, old abuses had been allowed to creep in again. It was Charles's ambition, born of that love for the sea and ships he had discovered as a boy, to continue and complete the great work begun by his predecessor ; and, although he was constantly held up by lack of funds and by

endless “inconveniences and mischiefs” at the Admiralty, in the dockyards, and even on the ships themselves, he finally achieved it. As an example of his difficulties, it is enough to mention that when ships returned to port, “incredible Proportions of Powder, Match, Cordage, Sails, Anchors, and all other Things, were embezzled and sold, and very often sold to the King himself, for the setting out other Ships and for replenishing his Stores.” And yet, in spite of such things, England’s supremacy as a great maritime power dates from about this time.

Many instances have been quoted of the deep personal interest which the King took both in the practice and theory of navigation. He was a regular and fascinated visitor at such naval bases and yards as Chatham and Deptford, even in the most bitter season of the year, and in his private laboratory at Whitehall would devote hours to a study of the intricate problems of naval architecture, a subject upon which he was justly regarded as expert. The river running below his window also served as an endless source of speculation and delight, and one of his favourite entertainments was the spectacle of water pageants, which he could enjoy in the company of friends and courtiers from the balconies of his own palace. Indeed, to nothing he undertook can we apply more

aptly Sheffield's general observation : " In the midst of all his Remissness, so industrious and indefatigable upon some particular Occasions, that no Man would either toil longer, or be able to manage better."

The reorganisation of the navy was but one of the many " Herculean Toils " in which he found himself caught. On it depended not only the safety, but also the prosperity, of his subjects. The second Dutch War, waged, like the first, in the cause of trade, against what was then the foremost mercantile power in Europe, was a vindication of the rights of English ships and English merchants to sail unmolested on the seas and to share in the wealth of foreign markets. But it was a costly enterprise, and, as it proceeded, the task of collecting sufficient money and material for the maintenance of the fleet became increasingly difficult, and the abuses we have noted began to reappear. The press-gang haunted the poorer quarters of the town, exercising its cruel power. " I never did see," says one, whose business it was to enforce it, " such natural expression of passion as in some women's bewailing themselves, and running to every parcel of men that were brought, one after another, to look for their husbands, and wept over every vessel that went off, thinking they might be there, and looking

after the ship as far as ever they could by moonlight, that it grieved me to the heart to hear them. Besides, to see poor patient labouring men and housekeepers, leaving poor wives and families, taken up on a sudden by strangers, was very hard, and that without press-money, but forced against all law to be gone. It is a great tyranny.” This alone was sufficient to damp the enthusiasm of the common people, which Pepys had shared when he wrote in his diary of the fierce and glorious engagement off Lowestoft in June 1665 : “ A greater victory never known in the world,” and recorded the fact that he had bought a new suit of clothes to celebrate it.

Two years later, it was a very different story. For in June 1667 the Dutch, taking advantage of the improvidence and supineness of the English command, sailed coolly up the Medway as far as Chatham and, meeting no resistance, destroyed or captured part of the fleet riding there at anchor. This daring, and after all innocuous, raid, unparalleled in the country’s history either before that day or since, shocked the confidence of the nation profoundly. For the first time since the Armada, eighty years earlier, men realised that England, though an island, was not immune from the danger of foreign invasion. Hyde, to whose many alleged misdeeds was added that of unnecessarily

prolonging the war, has left a vivid picture of the panic which arose as soon as the news reached London. "They who remember that *Conjunction*," he says, "and were then present in the galleries and privy Lodgings at Whitehall, whither all the world flocked with equal liberty, can easily call to Mind many Instances of such wild Despair and even ridiculous Apprehensions, that I am willing to forget." "They were," as Evelyn observed, "sad and troublesome times."

Puritan feeling ran high against the King on account of his supposed neglect of duty, and current gossip averred that he had nothing better to do but amuse himself and quarrel with the imperious Lady Castlemaine, or vainly pursue the lovely Frances Stewart. Charles was certainly indiscreet in his public appearances, especially in the early days of his reign, but it must be remembered that it was not easy for him to avoid publicity, seeing that anyone could wander through the palace at will, and that he had to eat his dinner before any stranger who happened to be passing through the room. Yet it does not seem to have occurred to him, or if it did he did not care, that popular approbation is rarely a pure expression of admiration but a mixture of many feelings, including envy and jealousy, which a very small thing may resolve. On this occasion a section of public

opinion turned against him, so that what before had been regarded as a subject for innocent diversion was now keenly resented. Peace with Holland was concluded at Breda in July. But the circumstances which compelled Charles to do so were beyond his control, and he cannot be blamed, except by the most austere moralist, for fiddling with his mistresses while his ships were burning at Chatham.

The army, on the other hand, was a problem more easily handled. As we have seen, it had taken far too much upon itself during the later years of the Commonwealth. The major-generals, or provincial governors, were then to all intents and purposes military dictators, and after Cromwell's death their misrule had brought the country to the verge of anarchy. Such a condition of affairs would soon have become intolerable if Monck had not appeared at a critical moment and persuaded the army that the recall of the King was as necessary as it was desirable. The Restoration accomplished, the need for a large, unorganised force ceased, although there remained, of course, the risk of trouble and possible conflict arising from the presence everywhere of idle, scattered troops. Charles, therefore, disbanded them, and reserved only three regiments of private guards as the nucleus of a regular standing army.

The Civil War and its aftermath of militarism had made people sick of fighting, and the average man or woman, who knew little and cared less about the European situation, the ascendancy of France, and the decline of the Empire, wanted nothing better than peace. "I pray God," wrote one from the bottom of her heart, "send me my life to see peace in our days, and that friends may live to rejoice each other." This moving prayer was answered at the Restoration. England was at peace with herself. But, on the Continent, there were wider issues involved which forced Charles into wars and alliances with the powers of western Europe. By his alliance with France, a Catholic yet tolerant country, Cromwell had destroyed for ever the supremacy of Spain in the old and new worlds ; by his war against the Dutch he had laid the foundations of England's commercial prestige and her colonial enterprise ; by both he had raised his country to be the greatest Protestant nation upon earth. The task of consolidating these great achievements fell to his successor.

Charles very soon perceived that his first step abroad would lead him into close – almost too close – contact with France and his autocratic cousin Louis XIV. His marriage to a Catholic princess, whose country was bitterly opposed to

its neighbour Spain, carried him a step nearer, since, by confirming his Catholic sympathies, it pointed the way to a possible counter-reformation which would have brought England ultimately into entire subjection to France. He was carried still further by the renewal of hostilities with Holland – the one serious rival to France's ambition to dominate Europe. By 1667, therefore, Charles entered into a private agreement with Louis XIV not to interfere with the latter's designs in the Spanish Netherlands, while Louis in turn promised to refrain from supporting the Dutch. It was the first of a series of similar secret compacts which were to cause infinite trouble in the future. For such a treaty, the terms of which are known only to two persons and perhaps a few confidants, implying obligations on either side which neither has the right to contract without the will and assent of the people, is the most dangerous weapon – as time and experience have shown – in the whole armoury of international politics. But since diplomacy was almost entirely dependent on personalities in the seventeenth century, and communications were slow, and an unprejudiced and well-informed Press did not exist, the King or his Ministers could easily and conveniently forget their responsibility to the State whenever an occasion arose for satisfying

some private end or ambition. Thus Charles, though at first insensibly, was, as we shall see, deliberately lured later on into an alliance with France, by the promise that it would show him a way out of his financial straits and enable him to overcome the obstacles which his Parliament, by incessantly refusing his requests for further supplies, placed in his path.

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The relation between King and Parliament was indeed the principal constitutional issue of Charles II's reign, as it had been of the previous one. With the example of his cousin, Louis XIV, before him, Charles certainly had leanings towards absolutism, but against this he had to set the fatal upshot of his father's defiance of Parliament. Since that bitter January day, the constitution of England had been moving slowly in the direction of parliamentary government. The old belief in the "divine right" of kings was falling out of fashion ; new theories of the relationship of the sovereign to his subjects, of liberty and toleration, were gaining ground and preparing the way for democracy. Many of the great social and political changes of the future were foreshadowed then in

the writings of Hobbes and Milton, and later in those of Locke. The period, it is true, was one of anticipation rather than of fulfilment ; broadly speaking, it coincided with the growth of rationalism, a habit of mind which had been developing imperceptibly since the beginning of the century, and which was the cause of an increasing indifference to the ancient authority of the Church.

Charles had the intelligence to see that he could not safely dispense with Parliament, though he was determined, if he could, to maintain the ancient prerogatives of the Crown. He preserved, therefore, the right to choose his own Ministers. But he chose them as foils to disguise his own policy, as scapegoats whom he could drive out into the wilderness as soon as Parliament or public opinion turned against him. In this way he could govern, not by his Ministers, but through them. Hyde, as we have seen, was his first, as it was his obvious, choice, but Hyde was too much of an autocrat to make a good foil. He had allowed himself to become identified with matters which he stubbornly refused to see would stir up popular indignation. Pride had raised him to a position that was indeed hopeless, and an attempt to win his master's approval by refusing to give Parliament an account of the supplies they had voted was neutralised by his outspoken criticism of the

King's private life. On one occasion Charles, who was admittedly "a patient hearer" and never objected to criticism as long as it was "done in a gentlemanlike manner," interrupted a conversation between the Chancellor and Lord Arlington, and, on inquiring the subject of it, was told that "they were bewailing the unhappy Life he lived, both with Respect to himself, who, by the Excess of Pleasures which he indulged to himself, was indeed without the true Delight and Relish of any ; and in Respect of his Government, which he totally neglected, and of which the Kingdom was so sensible, that it could not be long before He felt the Effects of it." But whereas Hyde sincerely believed that he was telling the truth, Arlington afterwards excused himself privately, admitting that for his part he had spoken only in jest, since he knew that such a confession would be as acceptable to the King as the mimicry which the Duke of Buckingham indulged in during "the nightly meetings" at Hyde's expense.

The old statesman, now almost crippled with gout, had over-reached himself, but still he refused to face the prospect of dismissal. Though he had worn himself out for his master's sake, he had never been rewarded with the confidence that springs naturally from mutual affection. There was, indeed, little genuine love in Charles's

nature, though the deficiency was supplied, as it commonly is in such cases, by infinite good fellowship and the desire to please everyone, irrespective of his deserts. Thus he was incapable of upholding the particular merits of any one person if it meant incurring the displeasure of the rest. So in one sense he may be said to have been ungrateful to those whose services claimed his attention and favour. But at the same time it must be granted that he had learnt by his earlier experiences to trust no man, and that inability to trust leads inevitably to an inability to love ; and, furthermore, that he had determined to take no responsibility for the actions of his Ministers. “ He lived with them,” says Halifax, “ as he did with his mistresses ; he used them, but he was not in love with them. . . . He was *free of access* to them, which was a very gaining Quality. He had at least as good a Memory for the Faults of his Ministers as for their Services ; and whenever they fell, the whole Inventory came out ; there was not a slip omitted ! ”

Hyde fell, as Montrose before him had fallen, and as Danby later would fall. On the eve of his dismissal his wife died, and at that dark and tragic moment, in spite of his son-in-law’s entreaties, on the 30th of August, 1667, a Privy Councillor was sent to take from him the Great Seal of

England. In all, seventeen charges were preferred against him, to which he replied in a personal letter to the King, who, it is said, held it remorselessly to a candle-flame. It was his last act on behalf of his faithful Chancellor, one that he had courage enough to perform himself – an act of utter and eternal oblivion.

Towards midnight on the 29th of November, 1667, Hyde left England for ever. From Montpelier he made answer in great detail to each one of the charges in his indictment ; but the hour for justification had passed, and he turned bravely to the greater task of vindicating himself in his memoirs. His proscription, seven years after the Restoration, is a turning-point in the reign. During those years, his chief concern had been the passing of five Acts against religious nonconformity which, together forming what is known as the Clarendon Code, “broke for ever the pretensions of Puritanism to political supremacy.” This stern legislation for establishing Anglicanism as the religion of England, and for denying liberty of worship to those who could not conform with its doctrines, while it legally disposed of the King’s former promise to support the Presbyterian Covenant, was indirectly aimed at his own unorthodox sympathy for the Catholic religion. Later, we shall see how profoundly

these Catholic leanings influenced the trend of domestic politics. While there is no longer any reason to doubt their existence, there is singularly little evidence to show how strong they were at any given moment. Bishop Burnet affirms that Charles “disguised his popery to the last,” but Halifax, a more acute and less biased judge, remarks that “there were broad peepings out, Glimpses so often repeated, that to discerning Eyes it was flaring.” He was certainly inclined towards Catholicism from his earliest manhood, though there were subsequent intervals during which he apparently dispensed with any positive faith. But, whatever his personal inclinations were – and it is not unreasonable to assume that the speculative and libertine streak in his character would find its fullest spiritual satisfaction in the authority of Rome – there were undoubtedly strong external forces at work : the support he had received from Catholic families after his defeat at Worcester, the proselytism of his wife and family, his reaction to the detestable experience of the Scottish Kirk, and the illustrious example of his cousin Louis XIV, which, if followed, might lead to material as well as spiritual salvation. If ever a man played with fire – the same fire that had consumed Guy Fawkes more than half a century before and has consumed him in effigy

once a year ever since — it was Charles II. Yet he played so prudently that not one hair of his head was singed, while others, less cautious and less able to dissemble, lost their lives and estates in the attempt.

Thus it is not without significance that two Catholics, Lord Arlington and Lord Clifford, were included in the Ministry, or Cabal, as it was then called, which Charles summoned after Clarendon had been banished, and through which he governed from 1667 to 1673, the other members of it being the mercurial and irresponsible Duke of Buckingham, the barbarous, slobbering, forceful Earl of Lauderdale, and Ashley — afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury — Achitophel of Dryden's great satire, the “fiery soul” who blazes meteor-like through the later years of the reign. In theory, the Cabal was an anticipation of the modern Cabinet, but in practice it had no collective responsibility — indeed, the King would confide to one or other of its members what he concealed from the rest — and was merely an instrument or, as has been suggested, a foil, to cover the private policy of the Crown. As for Parliament, Charles retained its support by the very simple and ingenious compromise of never actually dissolving it, though he prorogued it — that is to say, temporarily suspended its sittings — whenever it

attempted to oppose him or deny his requests. So it continued in office, comfortably provided with bribes and pensions, which none of its members could afford to sacrifice, for nearly eighteen years – from the spring following the dissolution of the Convention Parliament in 1660 until the beginning of the year 1679.

During the Cabal's six years of office, Charles showed himself a master at dissembling – “he was,” says Sheffield, “full of dissimulation and very *adroit* at it” – and the disastrous events of the period at home and abroad were largely the consequence of this practice. The Triple Alliance, drawn up by Sir William Temple and the Dutch Pensionary, de Witt, between England, Holland and Sweden, and ratified at the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, was intended to crush the dangerous and progressive ascendancy of France. Charles, however, who was secretly in league with his cousin, consented to it for the very different reason that a factitious defensive union with Holland against France would successfully destroy the pretensions of the Dutch to European power. By this understanding he committed himself to still further dependence upon France, and the time was fast approaching when he would find himself irrevocably bound by this foreign tie. On the 22nd of May, 1670, he signed at Dover the

celebrated and sinister *Traité de Madame*, the second and most stringent and binding of the secret treaties with Louis XIV, so called because the intermediary in the affair was his favourite sister, “that sun of Beauty,” wit, and intelligence, Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans, the “dear, dear sister” of the familiar and touching letters that passed between her and her brother. The clauses of this notorious agreement provided for an immediate gift of £150,000, in return for which Charles agreed to support his cousin in a war against the Dutch, and for an additional subsidy of a quarter of a million pounds for each year the war lasted. Finally— and this was revealed only to Clifford and Arlington — Charles pledged himself to declare, at his own convenience, his conversion to Roman Catholicism. An additional *douceur*, not provided for in the treaty but readily procured for Charles by the Duke of Buckingham, was a pretty maid-in-waiting belonging to the Duchess of Orleans — Louise de Quéroualle, afterwards rewarded for her tender services with the title of Duchess of Portsmouth, and with much more indeed than her royal lover ever bargained for. To complete and round off the intrigue, a *Traité simulé* was formally and openly introduced in the following year to disguise the true state of affairs.

Notwithstanding the financial relief that Charles received from this arrangement, his resources were still insufficient either to pay off old debts – now amounting to some three million pounds – or to cover current expenses. In this awkward but not uncommon predicament, there was nothing he could do but repudiate his obligations. His action in “stopping the Exchequer” – that is to say, his refusal to repay the principal of the sums he had borrowed from the wealthy and unpopular merchants who had constituted themselves the City’s bankers, and his forced conversion of these loans to a lower rate of interest – have generally been regarded as among the most reprehensible incidents of his reign. Undoubtedly they were directly as well as indirectly the cause of considerable distress, for the bankers, naturally enough, were not the only people to be hit, though they could best afford to suffer. But it has been suggested, in the light of recent experience, that, far from being immoral and impolitic, they were actually strokes of financial genius, without which the whole country might have become insolvent. There is, nevertheless, room to question whether Charles was actuated by such impersonal motives, and whether, driven into a corner, he did not choose to extricate himself as easily as possible but regardless of other people’s

interests. His conduct on this occasion has certainly not found apologists among those who would emphasise as frequently as possible his ruthless opportunism.

In the same year as this financial crisis, and almost in the same month, Charles, prompted by Clifford, made a tentative step towards fulfilling the most immoral clause in his compact with Louis XIV by suspending those sections of the Clarendon Code which inhibited Nonconformists from practising their religion. This Declaration of Indulgence instantly aroused the most violent agitation, for the veriest simpleton could see that the soothing generalisation of Nonconformity was only a cloak for furthering the “grand Catholic Design,” and even simpletons were not immune from the widespread terror of popery. The agitation in Parliament was such that Charles was coerced into submission, and within the twelvemonth agreed to the passing of a Test Act according to which all who held office under the Crown were obliged to declare against transubstantiation and to take the sacrament according to the Anglican rite. On this rock the Cabal, never at the best of times a united body, split. Clifford resigned from the office of Treasurer, while the Duke of York, who had recently announced his conversion, retired from his post as

Lord High Admiral to console himself a few months later with a second wife, the Catholic Duchess of Modena.

The “ grand Design ” for converting the country to Rome; although it had not yet attained the fearful proportions it was to assume within a few years, was already a subject for popular alarm. London, at any rate, was becoming increasingly infected by a kind of vague terror arising from obscure rumours and whispered conversations at the street corners, in taverns and coffee-houses, of invasion from abroad. To the terrible scourge of ignorance must be attributed the delusion – held by many men and women – that the Pope himself might sweep down from heaven in a fiery chariot and turn London and Westminster into suburbs of the Holy City. The scientific spirit had made little progress as yet in combating the evils of superstition to which the mass of the people were still a prey. Such enthusiasm as it inspired was still confined to a few cultured and enlightened men, amongst whom we may include the King, with whose encouragement and approval the Royal Society had been founded soon after the Restoration.

Some ten years before this time, Charles had granted it a charter and, with his brother, had enrolled himself amongst its original members. Three years later, in the summer of 1665, while

these men were quietly pursuing their inquiries into natural phenomena, London was suddenly swept by the worst — as it was happily the last — outbreak of the plague in its history. Science, pleasantly preoccupied with such mysteries as the fixation of mercury, had no thought of applying its knowledge to the situation, which by the early autumn was such that as many as seven thousand persons were carried off in a single week. The system of sanitation, even in the wealthiest parts of the town, was so primitive as to encourage rather than allay the infection. At Whitehall, for example, the kitchens were frequently flooded at high tide by the Thames, which then served as the common sewer of London. Between June and September, while the Court and all who could afford to follow its example remained in the country, nearly seventy thousand citizens were carried out into the fields and huddled together in common graves, the greatest number of them, according to Clarendon, being “Women and Children, and the lowest and poorest Sort of the People.” Not until the New Year, however, did Charles decide to return to Whitehall, where his presence set an example for others to do likewise, “all men,” it is recorded, “being ashamed of their Fears for their own safety when the King ventured his person.”

It would be proper to ascribe to a beneficent Providence the great fire which, in the space of five days, consumed above two-thirds of the City in the beginning of the following September, if it could be shown that it had any salutary effects. But it is doubtful if it produced any radical improvement in the slums other than thoroughly disinfecting the narrow streets and alleys which hitherto had harboured and aggravated every known disease. A new and certainly a fairer city grew from the ashes of the old. "To the amazement of all Europe," says Burnet, "London was in four years' time rebuilt with so much beauty and magnificence that we who saw it in both states cannot reflect on it without wondering . . . how it could answer such a dead charge." Yet the work of restoration was advanced too rapidly and with too much enthusiasm, with the result that one of the finest opportunities in the history of town-planning was improvidently thrown away, and, with the exception of St. Paul's Cathedral, Wren's designs for a new Jerusalem were discarded. More important at the time, however, was the political significance attached to the conflagration, for the common people could not believe that such an appalling catastrophe was the result of a mere accident in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane. But at the height of the fire,

when “the vast wealth of Thames street” was swept away in a single night, and the lead from the roof of old St. Paul’s fell in a molten shower into the crypt and there consumed the entire stock of the Stationers’ Company, no man had either time or inclination to look for possible causes ; hands, hearts, and minds were otherwise engaged. At all events, the behaviour of the King throughout that week of terror was unexceptionable, and the deep concern he expressed for the safety of Westminster Abbey and the treasures of the royal palace, revealed a side of his nature hardly compatible with the common view of him as given up solely to his own pleasures and private concerns. Both he and his brother James “rode from one place to another, putting themselves into great danger amongst the burning and falling houses, to give advice and direction what was to be done, and underwent as much fatigue as the meanest, and had as little sleep or rest.” The *London Gazette* praised them in the highest terms, and popular admiration and affection were further stimulated by the ballad-mongers, who addressed the homeless crowds with such lines as these :

*From Sunday morn till Thursday at night
It roar’d about the Town,*

*There was no way to quell its might
But to pull houses down ;
And so they did
As they were bid
By Charles, His Great Command ;
The Duke of York
Some say did work,
With bucket in his hand.*

But as the ashes cooled and men began graduall to regain their normal self-possession, old suspicions were revived and fresh rumours spread about that the fire had been deliberately kindled by popish agents. For a few months there wer premonitions of the universal terror that stalked through the town twelve years later. This yea – the *Annus Mirabilis* of Dryden's long narrative poem – was, as Clarendon observes, “long destined by all Astrologers for the production o dismal Changes and Alterations throughout the World” ; and though, he continues, “the King prepared with all his accustomed Vigour and Resolution, the Prediction had a strange operation upon Vulgar Minds.” Certainly the country was in an uneasy mood, though it is simpler to indicate causes for the general dis-ease than to determine the effects it wrought in society. Foreign affairs – the Dutch War ; the sympathy of the King and his cronies for Catholic France ;

the struggle for continental and extra-continental markets – such problems as these, too vast in their consequences to leave much impression on the individual, nevertheless cast their shadow upon the community and gave rise to vague and imponderable misgivings. On the other hand, in domestic affairs – the relation between Church and State and between King and Parliament, and the religious and political factions arising therefrom ; the influence of the Court ; the rapid, unsettling evolution of the scientific method – the restlessness of the individual was far more apparent, since these, for the most part, were questions which were disturbing to the peace of mind of every man and woman. We shall see how deeply the last fifteen years of the reign were troubled by them, and how the confusion stirred up by the so-called Popish Plot, and by the bitter party struggle to exclude the Duke of York from the throne in favour of the bastard Duke of Monmouth, was but the inevitable culmination of ten fruitless years of indecisive action.

Against this gathering storm the King appears a solitary yet desperately engaged figure – lonely in his private life, yet tied to a wife whom he might respect but could not love, to mistresses who could command his purse, sometimes even his policy, but rarely his affections ; isolated in the great

businesses of State, yet dependent on a Parliament he despised, Ministers he would not trust, and a cousin whom he feared.

Nevertheless, though he would employ on many occasions mean and indefensible stratagems to overcome or avoid a difficulty, neither these nor any other consequences of an inherited weakness can alter or diminish the strength of character conspicuous in the cool unruffled temper with which he faced the emergencies of those anxious years.



So much has been written already about his character, and, to this end, so much emphasis has been laid upon his private life, that it is almost superfluous to say more. For, just as no English king or queen can be said to have been more intimately associated with his subjects than Charles II, so none has been made more familiar to posterity. A king, it is true, must spend the greatest part of his life in public, and even the little time he can snatch from the business of the day for his private concerns must generally be shared with his courtiers. Nearly three hundred years have passed since quizzing crowds thronged

the precincts and even the inner chambers of Whitehall, and still the heart beats faster and curiosity runs like fire through the blood when the cry goes up : "Now the King comes." History cannot offer a more convincing proof of the reality of this strange blend of patriotic fervour and sentimental curiosity than the diary of that eager little bourgeois, Samuel Pepys, whose whole life revolved about the Court, and for whom the cares of office were amply recompensed by the almost daily spectacle of the King walking through the galleries of his palace or round the lake in St. James's Park, sailing down the Thames to Greenwich, or attending the public theatres. "Though," he records in one place, of the King and the Duke of York, "I admire them with all the duty possible, yet the more a man considers and observes them, the less he finds of difference between them and other men, though blessed be God," he adds, "they are both Princes of great nobleness and spirits." But with this fond statement should be compared the sterner judgment of a contemporary who, remarking that the King's "Wit was better suited to his condition before he was restored than afterwards," concluded that "the Wit of a Gentleman and that of a crowned Head ought to be different things."

We may recollect how the King's old tutor,
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Lord Newcastle, had recommended to him a certain measure of affability and condescension in his dealings with men — “ sometimes,” he hinted, “ a chat or a smile in the right place would advantage you ” — but his long, unkingly exile had provided many more opportunities for obeying this simple injunction than Newcastle had ever anticipated. After the Restoration, the temptation to continue on the same footing before with those about him, of whatever rank or station, proved irresistible. “ He was,” says Burnet, “ affable and easy, and loved to be made so by all about him.” By nature he was intensely sociable, loved company, and would welcome anyone, however unfamiliar, who would listen to his stories ; with the result which Halifax very quickly noticed that, “ of all men that ever lived, those who had Wit, he could best endure them who had none.” Indeed, apart from an occasional spell in his private laboratory, he could not turn his attention when left to himself to any of the intellectual or other distractions which, for most men, make solitude bearable and at times one of the rarest of pleasures. Fear of loneliness and its corollary, an excessive craving for society, are common symptoms of an unquiet, unhappy mind, and there can be little doubt that Charles — the “ Merry Monarch ” by tradition — was actually

victim of some intermittent form of melancholy.

His mode of life, reflected and magnified in the behaviour of the Court after the Restoration, tends to confirm this. For, while the first few blessed months of the new régime gave all men a reasonable excuse for making merry, and the sudden removal of puritanical restrictions naturally caused many people to abuse their new-found freedom by over-indulgence in those pleasures from which they had been separated, some further reason is necessary to explain why these inclinations were concentrated in the Court, even admitting that the Court had nothing better to do, and why they persisted therein long after the rest of the country had settled down. Undoubtedly the characteristics of a Court are ultimately derived from the king himself, who alone has power to influence its behaviour and authority to set it an example. And it is, therefore, in a study of his character that we shall find, if at all, the answers to these questions.

Because of his father's troubled reign and tragic death, Charles could not look back – as most men of fortune can – to a serene childhood and the security of home. His youthful recollections were most of them unhappy, and it is doubtful if in after years he cherished any pleasant memories of his upbringing. His mother, indeed, exasperated

him, and it was probably her domineering temperament which accounted for his breaking away from her and ever afterwards resenting the advice of the older generation. On the other hand, his love for his own brothers and sisters never altered ; in their lives, and beyond the premature deaths of three of them, it survived the strongest, as it was also the most unequivocal emotion he ever experienced. One brother the Duke of Gloucester – and one sister – the Princess of Orange – succumbed to epidemic diseases soon after the Restoration, their death casting a dark and sudden shadow over the prevailing merry-making ; the surviving sister “Minette,” Duchess of Orleans in France, from whose love, as we have seen, “rose the springs of tragic diplomacy” – died in the flower of her age, some say from poison, others more confidently from acute peritonitis, a few weeks after her triumphal journey to Dover and the signing of the *Traité de Madame*. Finally, he supported his brother and heir presumptive, the Duke of York throughout the stormy agitations concerning his right to succeed to the throne.

As far as may be judged, he had no very intimate friends nor any special favourites among men, for the easy terms of companionship were all he required and these were provided by

crowd of amiable courtiers. More than enough has been written about his attachment to, and toleration of, such sparks as Lord Rochester, Henry Killigrew, and the Duke of Buckingham, and far too much attention has been paid to the amusing, inaccurate, and often scurrilous anecdotes related by de Grammont in his *Memoirs of Anthony Hamilton*. Yet it cannot be doubted that he possessed feelings of a kind, though he rarely permitted himself to be openly moved by them. His grief at the death of his eldest sister – even the ordinarily cynical Lord Rochester noticed it – is sufficient proof. But more striking confirmation of their existence appears in his attitude to the Queen, and a study of this, in particular, throws some light on his relations with women in general.

Such inferences as may be drawn from his recorded conduct are, at the best, hypothetical. No contemporary account exists of what lay behind those dark, sullen eyes, or of what emotions illumined the saturnine cast of his features. His marriage, one suspects, was frustrated from the very beginning by sexual incompatibility, and it would not be altogether misleading to contend that his relations with other women – his mistresses, of whom upwards of a dozen are known by name – were conditioned by it. In his

treatment of the Queen, whose alien manners never adapted themselves successfully to the land of her adoption, there was much pity but little love; for pity in the end will cast out love. Her small stature and simple, graceless countenance can have had no physical attraction for a husband whose heart, to judge from the portraits of Lely and Kneller, was only seduced and captivated by beauty full blown, ripe lips and swelling bosom. And yet, the superior charms of her so-called rivals in the King's affections would never have proved so irresistible to him had she not failed in the one duty she had been called from her convent to perform — to bring into the world a heir to the English throne. Although the grave consequences of her sterility were reserved for the latter end of the reign, when those hopes which earlier rumours of pregnancy and marriage had raised were no longer permissible, it is certain that had she borne children, the course of history would have been changed and her husband's character profoundly altered.

During his exile, Charles had had other mistresses besides the obscure creature whose child — the Duke of Monmouth — became a putative heir to the crown. But there is no reason to suppose that these early experiences were the expression of an unusual or excessive sexual

appetite. On the contrary, they show that even a king – for all his divinity – is subject to the urgent temptations of the flesh, and that a vigorous body will find a simple satisfaction and a vacant mind a certain stimulus in them. For even the sternest moralist, though he may with good reason condemn the remedy, will not deny that in this “poor benefit of a bewitching minute” a man may escape from the common cares of life. This after all, is what Charles had chiefly desired in those melancholy times.

Perhaps it would be idle to consider how much a happy marriage after his Restoration would have canalised these wandering fancies. Yet, though his love for Catherine was thwarted, the unwonted tenderness he displayed whenever she was ill or showed signs of bearing a child – and on one occasion, at least, he was overcome with grief – the almost passionate resistance he put up against any proposal for a divorce – “it was,” he remarked, “a wicked thing to make a poor lady miserable, only because she was a wife, and had no children by him” – and the striking testimony he gave of his belief in her entire innocence of complicity in the Popish Plot, reveal a side of his nature that was never exposed to his concubines, unless we except his dying charge to the Duke of York to care for Nell Gwyn.

It was such occasions as these which calle forth his slender stock of generosity — “a Flower,” says Clarendon, “that did never grow naturall in the Heart of either of the families, that c Stuart, or the other of Bourbon,” and one tha never bloomed either for his Ministers or mis tresses. To the latter he would open his purs but not his heart ; he would keep them quiet by offering them the one, and himself at ease by denying them the other. As he grew older, thei demands grew in proportion, until one is temptec to conclude from this fact, and from the frequen allusions in ribald satire to his failing powers that he was unable to satisfy them. Were thi true, it would explain in part why he allowed him self to be increasingly governed by their whims, and would account also for the little apparent pleasure he finally found in their company. “ In his latter times,” observes Halifax, “ he had no Love but insensible engagements that made it harder than most might apprehend to untie them.” But even in the early years of his reign, when the population was yearly increased and the peerage enlarged by his many bastards, his will was weakened by that subservience commonly observed in men who, finding no satisfaction in a single woman, divide their time among many. “ He was,” says Sheffield, “ apter to be persuaded

into Debauches for the Satisfaction of Others, than to seek, with choice, where most to please himself." And he had, according to Clarendon, "An Aversion from Speaking with any Woman, or hearing them speak, of any Business but to that Purpose He thought them all made for" ; which is but another way of saying, as Halifax did, that "in his Inclinations to Love there was as little mixture of the Seraphick part as ever Man had."

The simple gratification of the senses, as his friend Lord Rochester discovered at the close of his brief and hectic life, can never fulfil, but only temporarily relieve, the sexual impulse — the deepest and most imperative of human instincts. The heaviness which overwhelmed Lord Rochester gradually enveloped his master and cast a damp over the latter end of his reign. How necessary it became to avoid exciting the irritation that is so closely allied to unhappiness of this kind appears in such a letter as this, addressed to one of the ladies of the Court : "Live easily with the King," it advises. "Never be so ill-natur'd to stir up his Anger against others, but let him forget the use of a Passion, which is never to do you good : Cherish his Love where ever it inclines, and be assur'd you can't commit greater Folly than pretending to be jealous ; but on the contrary, with Hand, Body, Head, Heart, and all

the Faculties you have, contribute to his Pleasure all you can, and comply with his Desires throughout.” Nell Gwyn was probably the only woman who did so consistently, from pure affection and natural simplicity of character and for no ulterior purpose. “She never meddled in matters of serious moment, or was the tool of working politicians, never broke into those amorous infidelities which others are accused of, but was visibly distinguished by her particular personal inclination to the King.” Certainly she neither prompted in her lover nor encouraged the gross insensibility which sometimes showed itself in his treatment of the Queen, when he was in the company of the Duchess of Cleveland and her imperious successor the Duchess of Portsmouth.

As for the Court in general, it took its lead from the King and soon outdistanced him. In the lively, and happily restricted, society which frequented the back-stairs of the Palace, where the egregious Mr. Chiffinch regulated the goings out and comings in of the favourites, a spirit of carelessness revelry prevailed. The pleasures they pursue were not very delicate, were often, indeed, the reverse; after Clarendon’s fall, “the court,” we are told, “fell into much extravagance; both King and Queen, and all the Court, went about masked, and came into houses unknown, an

danced there with a great deal of frolic.” But the cynical habit into which the Court had fallen during its exile, and in which it continued after the Restoration, of sacrificing religious principles to such hazy notions of self-interest as could be detached without much thought from the writings of men like Hobbes and Gassendi, neither fitted men for refinement nor induced them to cultivate it. In certain superficial respects – in dress, in food, and the like – as the comedies of the age attest, the Court of Charles II imitated that of his cousin Louis XIV, but there the resemblance ceased, and in all other ways, in its manners and converse, it more closely resembled the unpolished society of his maternal grandfather, Henri IV. At the French Court, the civilising influence of intelligent women was responsible for creating canons of good taste and behaviour which were never established in this country, because neither the Queen nor the King’s mistresses – though two of them, the Duchess of Portsmouth and the Duchess Mazarin, were French – had the genius or the ambition to promote them. It was the absence of any such standards which led inevitably to a restless, often reckless, pursuit of pleasure, and provoked the many scandalous incidents in which the chronicles of the age abound.

Charles, despite his notable predilection for

wasting time, had little relish for such extravagances. He enjoyed dancing and tennis and walking, as later he enjoyed horse-racing, because, as we have seen, he possessed abundant vitality and because good health was his chief concern. For gambling, which became the ruling passion of the Court, he cared nothing, and his frequent visits to the public theatres owed more to his fondness for company and a lively spectacle than to any profound taste for the drama. Unlike his father, he does not seem to have possessed a strongly developed æsthetic sensibility, and his patronage of the arts may be said to have been that of a king rather than that of a connoisseur. Above all, he delighted in experimental science, more especially in its application to practical problems, and to navigation in particular. "His Majesty," a French visitor remarked, "takes great Delight in finding out useful experiments in Navigation, wherein he has immense Knowledge." And it is recorded of a certain Dr. Dickinson that "what ingratiated him with his Majesty more than anything was his deep Knowledge in Chymistry," the King, it was observed, being "so great a Lover of this Art that he ordered a Laboratory to be built in Whitehall, under his own Bed-Chamber from which there being a Backstairs, he privately spent many hours in seeing and trying

experiments, no body being admitted but the Duke of Buckingham."

For all this, he remained an enthusiastic but dabbling amateur, since, in his application to anything, he was, according to Halifax, "fit to ride a Heat, but had not Wind enough for a Long Course"; and Burnet, whilst acknowledging his "great compass of knowledge," adds "that he was never capable of much application or study." Distractions burst in upon him, and, such was his easy-going, capricious nature, he allowed himself to be caught up by a thousand and one things which had no better recommendation than that they served to while away time and postpone an evil hour at the council table. "He was," says Burnet in another place, "an Everlasting Talker"; "witty," observes Sheffield, "in all sorts of Conversation, and telling a story so well that, not out of Flattery, but the Pleasure of hearing it, we seemed ignorant of what he had repeated to us ten times before." Less sympathetic listeners, however, confessed to boredom at oft-repeated tales, and those, in particular, in which were related the King's adventures after his escape from Worcester, and, on this account, regretfully noted his readiness to confide in complete strangers, provided only they would hear him.

Again, as Pepys relates, there were times when the King's apparent indolence, combined with the spectacle of his mild indiscretions, stirred up a certain amount of popular feeling. Yet the fact remains that he was, with all his faults, extraordinarily beloved by the common people. A superficial though charming comment on this is contained in Sorbière's account of a visit he paid to Whitehall soon after the Restoration. "As the Court of England," he noticed, "is not so great as ours, there is easier Access to the Prince; and this kind of private Life, which his exile in his younger years brought him to accustom himself to, inspires him with great Tenderness for his Subjects, and much Familiarity to Strangers besides, the Genius of the English does require they should be governed after this gentle manner." But, as the years passed, these democratic inclinations brought him into the company of men who, taking advantage of his tolerance and amiability on these privileged occasions to introduce serious topics into the conversation, embarrassed rather than upheld his policy of postponement. Two of his biographers refer to a "bewitching kind of pleasure called Sauntering," which he cultivated for this purpose. "The being galled with Importunities," says one, "pursued from one Room to another with asking Faces; the disma-

Sound of unreasonable Complaints, and ill-grounded Pretences ; the Deformity of Fraud ill-disguis'd ; all these would make any man run away from them ; and I used to think it was the Motive for making him walk so fast. "So it was more properly taking Sanctuary. He slumbered after Dinner, and had the Noise of the Company to divert him, without their Solicitations to importune him."

To this intimate detail may be added many others, which together compose a picture of his private life. "He grew by Age," writes Halifax, "into a pretty exact Distribution of his Hours, both for his Business, Pleasures, and the Exercise of his Health. . . . He walked by his Watch, and when he pulled it out to look upon it, skillfull Men made haste with what they had to say to him." Or we may think of him alone with his favourite spaniels in the Privy Garden, marking the hour by the Great Dial there, pausing on the way to tennis to greet a pretty face at an upper window or to feed the ducks in Rosamond's Pond. And in other scenes, other places — fireworks on summer evenings in Cheapside, sleighing and snowballing in Hyde Park, or dancing on the frozen Thames in winter ; pageants on the river, rope-walking in the Banqueting House ; leisurely progresses, accompanied with much merriment,

through East Anglia and Hampshire ; the putting to bed of a new mistress at Euston Hall, an old Elizabethan play revived in a barn at Newmarket, and early rising there – “the sweetest place in the world,” – to meet the dawn on the Heath or to watch a noble lord walk naked down the racecourse for a wager ; fishing all day at Datchet, charades at Windsor, and the suburban delights of Hampton Court – so, piece by piece fragments of memories preserved in old notebooks and in the now faded sheets of news-letters may be united into one composite whole, from which there emerges, though now blurred and disfigured by the passage of more than two hundred years, the commanding presence and enigmatic personality of the King.



Yet Charles never abandoned himself entirely to the charms of all this conviviality. While others danced, made love, played high, and drank deep, as if life were for ever circumscribed by an unbroken round of pleasure, he stood – in spirit, at least – outside the circle, only entering it from time to time in order to forget the private cares and state secrets which weighed heavily on his mind.

It is difficult to believe that in the last twelve years of his life he was ever free from anxiety for more than a few hours at a time. The future, so dark with misgivings about his successor ; the present, filled with contracts and engagements he could not fulfil and dared not violate, to his people, his wife, his cousin, his mistresses ; the past, reviving many memories of vanished hopes and irrevocable mistakes — such is, in fact, the background against which this so-called “ Merry Monarch ” stands.

His chief anxiety, as it was also his chief concern, after the Treaty with France in 1670, was the need for secrecy. With his cousin’s bribes, he could afford to keep his already Long Parliament quiet a little longer, though at the cost of concealing from it the extent of his indebtedness. The fateful day when he should declare his allegiance to Rome, and thereby acknowledge his submission to France, could happily be postponed. In 1672, the first consequence of this Treaty appeared in the violation of the Triple Alliance and in the renewal, on the most slender and inadmissible pretext, of the war with Holland. While the French Army pushed over the Rhine, the English Fleet, joined with the French, attacked by sea. But the united expedition led nowhere ; the Dutch cut their dykes, and this desperate yet adequate measure of resistance held up the

enemy, while Charles's nephew William, the young Prince of Orange and future King of England, was restored to the Statholdership of the Republic, from which he had been excluded for twenty years by the Grand Pensionary, John de Witt. The conduct of the war was blamed on this man by an exasperated population, and his death by assassination, which followed inevitably, at last enabled England and the States of Holland to enter into a family alliance. By February 1674, England's share in the war was formally concluded by the Treaty of London, and for the eleven remaining years of his reign Charles played no active part in the field of foreign affairs. Three years later, on the 21st of October, 1677, the marriage of William to his first cousin Mary, the eldest child of the Duke of York and his first wife, Anne Hyde, terminated for ever the hostilities between the two nations. The struggle between France and Holland on the Continent was, however, prolonged for a further period of four years after the Treaty of London. At last, after months of plotting and counter-plotting at the Hague between the English envoys and Prince William — during which Charles, on account of his constantly renewed secret agreements with Louis XIV, found himself very awkwardly involved, and, in his tricky attempts to serve his nephew and his

cousin at the same time, showed himself more than ever a master at dissimulation – a general peace was signed at Nimeguen in the summer of the year 1678.

In the meantime, Charles had manœuvred himself into a very slippery position. Ever since that day, eight years before, when at Dover he had pledged himself to France, the country had been growing more and more scared by the twin terrors of popery and French ascendancy. Four times since then Charles had given further pledges, and, in return, received from his cousin the financial aid denied him by his own Parliament, whose sittings throughout these years he had periodically suspended. The terror of popery had been fomented by the Declaration of Indulgence, but it was not mitigated by the passing of the Test Act or by the overthrow of the Cabal Ministry. Yet, in spite of his obligations to France, and so indirectly to Rome, Charles – whose family pride was deeply affected by the fortune of the House of Orange – was now pledged to his nephew as well. Consequently, the marriage at this juncture of his niece Mary to his nephew William was an event of the greatest importance, since it served to calm the popular agitation against France and to place England in a position to mediate for European peace. For, notwithstanding her support,

Charles dreaded France, as indeed she was dreaded for a common enemy by the whole of western Europe. Thus, he had reason to hope that the strengthening of his position abroad might encourage Parliament, as the fear of French invasion increased, to vote the money necessary for maintaining an army, and that with this army he might free himself for ever from parliamentary control.

In all these matters, Charles was supported and advised by Clifford's Protestant successor in the office of Lord High Treasurer – Sir Thomas Osborne, Clarendon's old enemy and one of the instruments of his fall who, on his promotion to the highest office of State, had been created Viscount Latimer and Earl of Danby. Now, although Danby hated France, and as far as possible used all means in his power to break down her aggressive influence, he was detested by his colleagues, by Parliament, and by the common people. The subject of innumerable lampoons and derisive comments, he was accused – and justly so – of corruption and of building up his private fortune out of public funds. According to Burnet, he was “the most hated Minister that had ever been about the King.” Yet his relations with his master, though strained, were not unfriendly, and the marriage of his daughter Bridget

to one of the royal bastards prevented them from breaking. Charles, however, had no illusions about his latest foil. The time would come inevitably when, like Clarendon, Danby would have to go the way of all confidential advisers, sacrificed without misgiving to popular clamour. Already, indeed, Danby had antagonised Louis XIV by negotiating the marriage of William and Mary ; and if the effect of this was to compromise the power of France in Europe, it was also bound to vitiate Danby's relations with Charles, who could not afford to offend his cousin. If anything, Danby's position was more precarious than Clarendon's had ever been, not only because it was – in the face of conflicting policies – more isolated, but because it compelled him to be an unwilling confidant of the King's secret treaties with France. Sooner or later, the truth, or some hint of the truth leaking out, would deprive him of power.

Danby's Ministry coincided with the darkest and most critical period of the reign. Over everything hung the threatening menace of France and Catholicism, and, as the storm gathered, London was filled with sinister suspicions. The Duke of York had openly declared himself a papist, and the possibility of excluding him from the throne was widely debated ; moreover, it was grimly

rumoured that the King himself was on the path to Rome. Parliament, when it had the chance of doing anything at all, refused to vote supplies until the King disclosed his foreign policy. At this point — the beginning of the year 1678 — when war seemed inevitable, Charles made a desperate attempt through Danby and Ralph Montagu, his Ambassador in Paris, to force his cousin's hand by demanding, as a guarantee of peace, the prodigious sum of six million French *livres* to be paid in three annual instalments. Inscribed at the foot of the two letters containing the proposition were the words, in Charles's own hand, "I approve of this letter," and the royal initials "C. R." The crookedness of this transaction was unmistakable when it transpired that Danby, meanwhile, had persuaded Parliament to pass an Act for raising money for a war with France. Charles, as usual, watched the progress of this deplorable intrigue with cynical detachment. When the truth came out, Danby knew that he would find no shelter behind the throne ; Charles faded from the scene, leaving his unlucky Minister to cope with an impossible situation. It was only to be expected that this bare-faced piece of diplomacy would resolve itself into a personal quarrel. Montagu instantly attributed the failure of his ambition to be made a Secretary of State to Danby's influence ;

and, deprived of his Paris Embassy for seducing, in the summer of 1678, Anne, Countess of Sussex — one of the King's children by the now discarded and embittered Duchess of Cleveland — he determined to betray the Treasurer. Substantially bribed for the purpose by Louis XIV, Montagu communicated the fatal letters to the English Parliament, and Parliament, tactfully ignoring the damning postscripts, decided to impeach Danby.

At this crisis in the early autumn, the storm which had been feared and expected so long broke. In the first week of September a certain Titus Oates — abetted by a Dr. Tonge, "a very mean divine" — laid information to Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, a Justice of the Peace for Westminster, concerning "a damnable and hellish plot, carried on by Popish recusants, for assassinating the King, the subverting the Government, and for rooting out the Protestant Religion." On Michaelmas Eve, Oates was brought before the Council, and testified that a design was on foot "to kill the King, by shooting, stabbing, or poisoning." In the frightful and hardly conceivable uproar which ensued, little attention was paid to the validity of the pretentious proofs concocted by Oates and his confederates. They confidently affirmed, for instance, that the Duchess of York's confessor, Coleman, was in league with France,

and his private correspondence was cited in evidence. From the first, however, the state of popular feeling, which had been tormented by suspicions for years, was such that positive proofs were unnecessary ; the mere statement that a plot existed was sufficient to set people off. Never has the ninth commandment been broken with less cause and more brazenly than it was at this time ; the City swarmed, and the very air grew heavy with the hosts of spies and informers. One Saturday, early in October, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey left his house and never returned. His body, strangled and stabbed through with his own sword, was discovered five days later lying in a ditch near Primrose Hill. At once, “ the whole town was all over inflamed ” by this brutal and mysterious crime, which seemed to an already frantic public to confirm the worst of Oates’s depositions, and only the slender doubt that Godfrey had not been murdered, but had committed suicide, prevented a general massacre of the Catholics.

While the ladies of the Court, characteristically, went about with little pistols concealed in their muffs, the King made away to Newmarket, which, according to Burnet, “ was censured as a very indecent levity in him, to go and see horse-races.” But those who censured were not then

in a position to gauge the wisdom of his departure. For, although Charles could not have foreseen the coming of Oates, he must have anticipated the consequences of his revelation, and realised that he was too firmly bound by his own Catholic sympathies either to countenance or frustrate the plot. Discretion, in the circumstances, was the better part of valour, and so he removed himself as quickly as possible from the seat of trouble, where he might have had to explain his apparent insensibility to what was happening. Yet it is fairly certain that he discredited from the very beginning all that Oates had alleged, since he alone knew which way the wind was blowing, and it was incredible that either the Pope or his cousin should expect to promote a counter-reformation by planning to kill him, the chief agent in their designs. Nevertheless, the very fact that he was their secret agent made it impossible for him to take sides, and at this stage he must have begun to feel the evil effects of his subjection to France. In short, a visit to Newmarket was the easiest, as it was also the most obvious way out of the difficulty, for there, at least, he could remain until the fury had spent itself. That it is difficult, if not impossible, to excuse his conduct on this occasion, even the warmest of his apologists will hardly deny. For while

he, in the country, played for the safety, not of his life — which was never for a moment in danger — but of his conscience, which was, at that time, as guilty as any man's has ever been, hundreds were brought to trial in London for complicity in a plot which had no existence outside the twisted imaginations of a pack of scoundrels.

One of these creatures, William Bedloe, an intimate crony of Oates, swore that he knew the secret of Godfrey's murder, and, although Danby and the King were aware that his evidence had been tampered with, he was brought before the committee of investigation presided over by Shaftesbury. The mob, however, were so desperate for revenge that the discrediting of Bedloe's testimony merely served to inculpate the Treasurer, and to the charges already preferred against him was added that of promoting the "horrid plot." The situation was again suddenly altered by the accusations made by a defaulting debtor against a poor Catholic silversmith called Miles Prance. After weeks of cross-examination, this unfortunate wretch was tortured into giving a detailed account of how Godfrey had been murdered by three of the Queen's servants at Somerset House, and how his body, concealed in a sedan chair, had been carried by night four days later from the Strand to Primrose Hill.

Bedloe reappeared at this point and pretended – how feebly, no one was then sufficiently sober to judge – to corroborate this tale, with the result that three guiltless men were condemned to death. Not until six years had passed was it proved that Prance, under stress of examination, had been forced to perjure himself, and that his story was pure invention from beginning to end. The mystery of Godfrey's death has never been cleared up since that time, though it can scarcely be doubted that the murder was contrived by Oates to lend colour to his monstrous inventions.

Meanwhile, perjurors were richly rewarded, pardons freely offered to Catholic informers, and Oates, a popular hero, with a royal pension of £40 a month – the vilest bribe the King ever sanctioned – and rooms in Whitehall, dared to say that he had overheard the Queen give her consent to the murder of her husband. This insufferable lie marked the turning of the tide. Charles, deeply resenting this impudent attack, dismissed the accusation with contempt, for he knew – and so did everyone else – that the Queen, in spite of “some disagreeable humours, was not capable of a wicked thing.” Thenceforward, though for the next two years milder scares such as the “Meal-tub” plot, attributed to a popish midwife, prolonged without increasing the

original agitation, the numbers of the informers diminished as the judges grew less and less willing to listen to their falsehoods. Although various causes contributed to the ultimate extinction of the plot, the trial and condemnation of Lord Stafford, who had been taxed by Oates and his gang and by them alone with supporting it, were chiefly responsible for bringing men back to their senses. For Stafford was undoubtedly traduced, and his demeanour before he died confirmed his innocence in the eyes of all who stood about the scaffold.

As the villainy underlying the entire scheme began to appear, the general terror subsided and the political significance of the plot was disclosed. The charges against Danby were revived ; and the anti-Catholic party, led by Shaftesbury, who as a member of the Cabal, had signed — though unaware of the “grand design” — the infamous Treaty of Dover, began to question the right of succession of the Catholic Duke of York.

Danby, who in the early days of the panic had listened to the conspirators with an open mind, was forthwith accused of having “traitorously concealed the late horrid plot.” Further, he was charged with “encroaching to himself royal powers by treating of matters of peace and war without the knowledge of the Council” ;

with designing to "raise an army upon pretence of a war with the French," and then keeping "the same as a standing army within the kingdom"; and with crimes of less account, though none the less exaggerated. In the last month of the year 1678, Charles, in an attempt to save, with Danby, his own honour, prorogued the Long — inordinately long — Parliament for the last time; on the 24th of January following, a season so cold that the Thames was frozen over, he finally dissolved it, having suffered its existence for eighteen years. Accordingly, Danby received a pardon under the Great Seal of England, together with the good wishes of his master. But they availed him nothing, for a new Parliament, summoned shortly afterwards, clamoured for his impeachment, and, while the great Act of Habeas Corpus was hurriedly passed — in the Upper House, it is said, by the happy expedient of counting of one stout lord as ten — Danby was committed to the Tower of London, where he remained in semi-captivity for the next five years. The new Parliament, however, was short-lived. Shaftesbury, riding on the crest of the wave of anti-Catholic feeling aroused by the Popish Plot, moved to exclude the Duke of York from the succession. His attempt to force a decision was premature, and Charles, fearful of the issue,

dissolved Parliament in July before the Bill had reached its third reading. "I shall find mean to pay the fleet," he is recorded to have said "and manage economically; it will be difficult and uncomfortable for me, but I will submit to anything rather than endure the Gentlemen of the Commons any longer." So the curtain fell on the last act but one of his reign, and the long interval gained by the dissolution enabled him to postpone for a short space the opening of the final act and the solution of the problem of who should succeed him.

But the events of the last few months had left their mark upon him. Strangers in London, sending Christmas news into the country, noted that the King looked so very ill "that they were grieved to see him"; and "that they had never seen a man have more discontent and disorder in his looks." In truth, his long struggle with Parliament, his anxious negotiations with France and counter-negotiations with Holland, his having to keep the peace with his Ministers and his mistresses, had at last crushed in him the bright, care-free spirit with which his Restoration, twenty years before, had seemed to herald in a new heaven and a new earth.



In the summer of 1679, the King's long spell of good health broke under the strain. For the first time since he had had the measles in Holland, "he was taken ill at Windsor of an intermittent fever ; the fits," it is recorded, "were so long and severe, that the physicians apprehended that he was in danger - an accident," says Burnet, "that put the whole nation in a fright, and produced very great effects." For while those who watched the King tossing and fretting on his bed struggled in their ignorance to calm the fever, the country at large succumbed to a more serious kind of disorder, arising out of the uncertainty of who would succeed him in the event of his death - the legitimate but Catholic Duke of York or the illegitimate Protestant Duke of Monmouth. While the popish terror lasted, Charles had wisely ordered them both to go abroad. Yet, in spite of his official denial, for his brother's sake, of the persistent rumour that he had been legally married to Lucy Walters, the slur of illegitimacy made little difference to Monmouth's supporters and none - when he returned - to his amazing popularity with the common people. This, much to his father's vexation, steadily increased during his almost royal progresses in the country, and notably during his expedition to Scotland in June and

after his victory over the rebellious Covenanter at Bothwell Brig. And again, though Charles told Burnet "he had rather see Monmouth hanged, as well as he loved him, than acknowledge his legitimacy," his deep affection for the first and loveliest of his many natural children was far too widely known not to create in men's minds the gravest doubts about the future. On the other hand, no such tenderness existed between the King and his brother James. It had been observed, for example, that whereas the Duke of York had shed many tears when he was sent abroad, Charles had shed none at his departure. As heir apparent now, he could do nothing but watch the progress of the intrigue to depose him, checking meanwhile any impulse to advertise unnecessarily his allegiance to the Catholic faith. Though bigoted, he did not try to anticipate or alter the course of events, believing then — as many thousands did — in "the unalterable law of succession." Nevertheless, it is significant that, at the height of his brother's illness, he was summoned back to Windsor urgently and "very secretly." When he reached the castle, however, the danger had passed, for towards the end of August the fever yielded, appropriately enough, to the mysterious operations of the Jesuits' powder, or quinine, and

Charles, rapidly regaining his usual health, returned at the earliest possible moment to the heavy diet he had always loved, not wisely but too well — mutton and partridges, “on which,” noted an eye-witness of his convalescence, “he fed frequently and heartily.”

With the restoration of his health and his return to London, a crisis was narrowly averted, though the general situation remained much the same as before. The mind of the nation was still harassed by doubt. The King, it is true, was still alive, but his sudden decline was regarded as an ominous portent, though he himself does not seem to have thought of it with any particular foreboding. Dragged back to life by the lucky experiments of half a dozen bewildered doctors, he was less concerned with his own future than with his brother’s, for which, in a sense, he had made himself morally responsible. “When I am dead and gone,” he remarked on a later occasion, “I know not what my brother will do. I am much afraid, that when he comes to the crown, he will be obliged to travel again. And yet I will take care to leave my kingdoms to him in peace, wishing he may long keep them so”; but, he reiterated, “I am much afraid that when my brother comes to the crown, he will be obliged again to leave his native soil.”

By September, the agitation for the exclusion of the Duke of York, or alternatively for the limitation of his prerogatives in the event of his succeeding, had developed into a political issue of such magnitude that Charles again commanded him and the Duke of Monmouth, in their own interest and for the public safety, to leave the country. Two months later, when the unhappy Queen's birthday was celebrated in the streets of London by spectacular Pope-burnings and anti-Catholic demonstrations, Monmouth, though now deprived of all his offices and titles, crept back again to negotiate with Shaftesbury.

The government of the country, since Danby's overthrow, had been invested in a new form of Privy Council containing about thirty members, under the presidency of Shaftesbury, which, with the exception of a small but active minority in favour of limitation, supported the Exclusion Bill. As the year drew to its close and still no decision had been reached, Shaftesbury's supporters – or Whigs, as they began to be called – petitioned Charles to call Parliament, while the Court party, upholders of the old Stuart despotism – Tories, or “Abhorriers” – who regarded as abhorrent any attempt to make the problem of the succession a subject for parliamentary debate, stoutly resisted the proposal. For, although a

general election had taken place soon after the King's recovery, Parliament had been prorogued before it ever met, and was not, in fact, to assemble at Westminster for another year, Charles, characteristically, having decided to allow time for the general ferment to settle. In the circumstances, it was perhaps the most prudent policy, seeing how short a time had passed since the Plot, and how small a thing might yet re-kindle the flames in which so many brave and innocent men had already perished. Meanwhile, by giving the anti-Catholic faction a free hand to agitate for the exclusion of the Duke of York and the reception of the "Protestant Duke," he was indirectly serving his brother's cause, since, sooner or later, there was almost bound to be a popular reaction to a political movement which was beginning to savour of persecution.

When Parliament finally met in October 1680, the Exclusion Bill was at once brought forward and passed through the Commons. But it was rejected by the Upper House, largely through the influence of Lord Halifax, the leader of the minority – the Trimmers, or mediators between the Whigs and Tories – who favoured limitation. About the same time also, the trial and execution of Lord Stafford, as we have seen, did much to prejudice the claims of the anti-Catholic party

and to discredit its schemes for promoting the Protestant cause. At the beginning of the New Year, on the 18th of January, Charles – rather than allow it to appear that he sanctioned in any way the policy of the Tory Party, or that he was antagonistic to the long-suffering and maligned Catholics – dissolved his fourth Parliament.

The resolution and independence he had shown throughout the winter were indeed remarkable. For the first time in the twenty years of his reign that had already passed, he was beginning to assume control of the situation, not so much by taking arbitrary measures to assert his authority, as by playing one party against the other until their conflicting policies were so inextricably tangled that he could profit by their disagreements to further his own designs. His own policy had always been, and indeed still was, capricious, but to most people, who understood very little of what was going on behind the scenes, it seemed at least to possess a power and a prestige which the others lacked. And although his personal charm, and the easy manners which had ingratiated him with all who happened to cross his path, had occasioned some reprehensible, even deplorable incidents in his private life and in his public appearances, he had forfeited in their eyes none of the attributes nor any of the dignity of the

Crown. For the world at large knew nothing of the secrets of the royal bedchamber, or of those sessions in the House of Lords, when business was informally debated round a comfortable fire while the King's ubiquitous spaniels romped about the room. He was still a god to those – the mass of the population – who, in their weakness, needed a human symbol for the traditions, government, prosperity, and greatness of their country. Not since the Restoration had men and women welcomed the King with hearts more full of simple affection, and considered the mystery of his office with intenser loyalty than they did at this time.

Nevertheless, it was still necessary to regard the feverish activity of Shaftesbury and the Whigs as a menace to the body politic ; for, although the passions aroused by the Popish Plot had abated, a little thing might stir them up again. Fearing this, Charles resolved on his own initiative to summon a new Parliament away from London, and writs were issued accordingly for its assembling at Oxford on the 21st of March.

Shaftesbury and his supporters, who had now dared to arm themselves and, it was rumoured, were prepared to fight for their precious Bill if necessary, poured into the University in a mood of almost fanatical enthusiasm, their hats and cuffs adorned with ribbons bearing the device :

“ No Popery ! No Slavery ! ” In due course Charles arrived, in the company of the Queen, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Nell Gwyn, and a great company of horse and footguards, courtiers, household servants, and officers of State. According to the Oxford antiquary, Wood, “ all the way the king passed were such shoutings, acclamations, and ringing of bells, made by loyall hearts and smart lads of the layetie of Oxon., that the aire was so much pierced that the clouds seemed to divide. The generall cry was ‘ Long live King Charles,’ and many drawing up to the very coach window cryed ‘ Let the king live, and the devill hang up all roundheads ’ : at which his majestie smiled and seemed well pleased. The throng and the violence of the people to express their affections were such that the coach was scarce able to pass. The youths were all on fire, and when love and joy are mixed, cannot but follow rudeness and boisterousness. Their hats did continually fly, and seriouslie had you been there, you would have thought that they would have thrown away their verie heads and leggs. Here was an arme for joy flung out of joyst and there a legg displaced, but by what art they can find their way back let the Royal Society tell you. ’Twas observed by some of our *curiosi* that as the king passed westward up the High Street, the small rain that then fell,

which was driven by the west wind, was returned back all the way in that street at least a man's length by the verie strength of the voices and hummings. At the king's comming unto the most spatiouse quadrangle of Christ Church, what by the shouts and the melodious ringing of the ten statelie bells there, the colledge sounded and the buildings did learne from its scolars to echo forth his majestie's welcome. You might have heard it ring againe and againe : ‘ Welcome ! Welcome ! ! thrice welcome !! Charles the great ! ’

“ After nine at night were bonfires made in severall streets, wherein were onlie wanting rumps and cropt eares to make the flame burne merrily, and at some were tables of refection erected by our bonny youths, who being e'en mad with joy, forced all that passed by to carouse on their knees a health to their beloved Charles. So without preface or ceremony let it be spoken, the genius of this place by Cæsar's approach is quite altered ; the severest Muses smoothe their brow and all the Graces begin to smile ; not a frown or ill natured look to be seen but candid aspects in every phisiognomy ; our senses are alleviated and nothing is wanting.”

Nothing, maybe, was wanting to crown these demonstrations, but there was much that had better been omitted. Charles realised that now,

if ever, it was time to deal with the rebellious Opposition. After a day's diversion at the horse-races on Burford Down, and a visit to the theatre, he delivered his inaugural address — “a smart speech” — to the assembled Houses : “The unwarrantable proceedings of the last House of Commons were the occasion of my parting with the last Parliament ; for I, who will never use arbitrary government myself, am resolved not to suffer it in others. I am unwilling to mention particulars, because I am desirous to forget faults ; but whoever shall calmly consider what offers I have formerly made, and what assurances I made to the last Parliament and then shall reflect upon the strange unsuitable returns made to such propositions by men who were called together to *consult*, perhaps may wonder more that I had patience so long, than that at last I grew weary of their proceedings. I conclude with this one advice to you, that the rules and measures of all your votes may be the known and established laws of the land, which neither can nor ought to be departed from, nor changed, but by Act of Parliament ; and I may the more reasonably require that you make the laws of the land your rule, because I am resolved they shall be mine.” But these wise constitutional words fell on deaf ears, were disregarded by men who were ruthlessly

determined to have their own way. For a week after the opening of the session Charles left them alone ; then, seeing how nothing would be effected as long as they persisted in their present unruly frame of mind, he acted suddenly and unexpectedly. “The Lords being satt, not in their robes (as is usuall at prorogations and dissolutions) the King came into the House,” crowned in his robes of state which, it is said, had been conveyed secretly into Christ Church in a sedan chair, and sent for the Commons to attend him. This dramatic and unforeseen gesture produced the utmost consternation ; it was at once obvious what the King’s intentions were. Turning to his faithless Commons – “Gentlemen,” he said, “that all the world may see to what a point we are come, that we are not likely to have a good end, when the divisions at the beginning are such ; therefore, my Lord Chancellor, do as I have commanded you.” Accordingly, Lord Chancellor Finch, “by His Majesties command, declared the Parliament dissolved.” “This sudden dissolution,” observes Luttrell, “was to the surprise of all persons, and to the Parliament themselves, they expecting no such thing ; and ’tis said ’twas known but to four persons.”

Immediately after the dissolution of the last Parliament he was ever to call, Charles returned

triumphantly to London, leaving Oxford in the highest state of confusion, so great was the desire of everyone to get away from the city with the least possible delay. As the news reverberated through the country, cities, towns, villages, many of which had actually elected to the last two Parliaments members who were opposed to the Court, dispatched their humble addresses of loyalty to the throne. Shaftesbury had fallen, and, falling, had crushed the cause for which he had fought, madly perhaps, but always with supreme skill and energy.

*A fiery soul that, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy-body to decay,
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.*

By the summer, broken now in health, which had never recovered from an accident sustained in the King's service more than twenty years previously, he was accused of high treason for designing the exclusion of the Duke of York, and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. The tide of anti-Catholic feeling had turned, as sooner or later it was bound to do. But once again, though only for a moment, Shaftesbury raised his head when in November, the grand jury — a packed body of Whigs — refusing to acknowledge his guilt, returned a Bill of *Ignoramus* to the indictment.

Throughout the autumn, whether at the Lord Mayor's Show and round the bonfires in Westminster, or at Newmarket and Cambridge, hawking and cock-fighting or dining "most splendidly," the King received amazing proofs of his popularity. On the 29th of October, "attended with many of the nobility and persons of quality, he and the Queen went to Guildhall, and did the city the honour to dine there; their entertainment was very splendid and magnificent; and in the evening their majesties returned to Whitehall very well pleased, amidst the repeated acclamations of the people, which were very great both at their entrance into the city and at their departure too."

By Christmas much of the old bitterness and discontent had disappeared or been forgotten, and for a while, at any rate, a blessed calm survened. At Whitehall, the great event of the winter season was the elaborate entertainment provided for the Emperor of Morocco's Ambassador and his native suite, whose strange customs and even stranger costumes aroused the greatest curiosity and amusement wherever they were seen. Early in the New Year, John Evelyn, the diarist, attended "a great banquet of sweetmeats and music at the Duchess of Portsmouth's glorious apartments, at which both the Ambassador

and his retinue behaved themselves with extraordinary moderation and modesty, though placed about a long table, a lady between two Moors, and amongst these were the King's natural children, namely, Lady Lichfield and Lady Sussex, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Nelly, etc., concubines, and cattle of that sort, as splendid as jewels and excess of bravery could make them.” It is perhaps significant that, on this brilliant occasion, Charles only made an appearance towards the end of the evening. His thoughts and interests now lay elsewhere. He would still rise early to go by water to his beloved ship-yards, would retire more frequently to his laboratory, would dream – if at all – of the informal delights of Windsor, Newmarket, and the Hampshire Downs. In February 1682 he laid the foundation-stone of “The Colledge at Chelsey for the relief of the poor maimed soldiers.” Otherwise, nothing extraordinary occurred to trouble the comparative peace of the succeeding months.

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In October, Shaftesbury escaped to Holland, where he was to die two months later. “The Protestant Duke,” it is true, was still at liberty in

England, but his wanderings up and down the country were no longer regarded as a serious menace. For all his winning ways — “ nature, it was said, perhaps never formed anything so perfect as the external graces of his person ” — which continued to captivate many simple people, politically he was now a mere puppet. His uncle, moreover, was beginning to enjoy a certain popularity on his re-appearance at Court and on account of the welcome, more official than fraternal, that Charles had accorded him. Thus, the problem of the succession had virtually resolved itself in his favour now that men had occasion to consider the unconstitutional means Shaftesbury had employed to overthrow him, and the imminent danger of civil war which his conduct at the Oxford Parliament had created. In due course, he was restored to the office of Lord High Admiral, Charles having suspended the Test Act in his favour ; Danby and other nobles who had been imprisoned for their alleged share in the Popish Plot were released ; while Oates, deprived of his pension and the many other benefits he had procured, was heavily fined and pilloried. Furthermore, the dissolution of Parliament and the subsequent exclusion of the Whigs from power by the simple expedient of taking away the charters of London and other

towns, completed the triumph of the Tory Party and made Charles absolute master of the situation.

Yet it would be false to assume from all this that the last two years of his reign were free from anxiety. For example, the surrender of the civic charters, which made free elections impossible, "gave great occasion of discourse and thoughts of hearts, what this would end in"; and "prudent men" grieved for "the old foundations" on seeing the sudden diminution of "the pomp and grandeur of the most august City in the world." Again, in the spring of 1683, the exposure of a plot, in which Monmouth was implicated, to kill the King and the Duke of York at Rye House, a lonely dwelling on the road from Newmarket to London, showed that the anti-Catholic party had not been totally eclipsed by Shaftesbury's death. The significance of this conspiracy lay not so much in what it actually proposed, but failed to accomplish, as in the unrest and dissatisfaction brewing in the minds of those who planned it. The murder of the King at that moment would only have accelerated the events which, within six years of his natural death, lost Monmouth his head and the Duke of York his kingdom.

Dark as the final scene appears, Charles seems to have accepted it in the spirit of old Lord

Leicester's philosophy — “ ‘Tis all one” ; turning away from the spectacle, as he used to slide from importunate callers and nagging Ministers, with no other desire except health to enjoy for ever the sharp air on Newmarket Heath. By many and devious schemes he had established his authority, preserving even at the most perilous moments a balance that must have astonished the very few men who shared the secrets of his shifting policy. He was a master, indeed, on the tight-rope of statecraft, when a single false step might have precipitated him to his destruction and thrown the nation into disastrous chaos. During these final years a deceptive peace prevailed — peace that could only last as long as the King was alive to preserve it, and, what is more, pay for it with the bribes he was taking from France. Even so, now that he lacked the financial support of Parliament, drastic economies were necessary, and he was reluctantly obliged to abandon Tangier, “ which had been kept at great charge for twenty years.”

No one can tell how much, if at all, Charles appreciated the consequences that were bound to spring from his secret covenants with France after his death ; certainly, there is nothing to show that he regretted the shady part he had played in them. If his conscience was easy, it was assuredly

so because he had committed it to the safe keeping of the Church of Rome. This, the last and the greatest of his secrets, he kept until the end, although there was at this time, according to Burnet, “great expectation in the Court of France that he would declare himself a Papist.” But neither in the Church nor elsewhere could he find relief or respite from the steady pressure of domestic cares, chief amongst which were the endless demands made upon him by his mistresses. The Duchess of Portsmouth in particular, as time went on, seems to have become extraordinarily ravenous, and immense sums of money were paid out to her from the Secret Services Fund. Indeed, Charles seems to have been unable to deny her anything, and it is hard to conceive a reason for such unprecedented generosity unless it is that these gifts, by satisfying her in one respect, compensated her for his failure or disinclination to satisfy her in another. Evelyn, whose curiosity sometimes took him to places from which modesty and prudery normally debarred him, has left this brilliant description of the splendour of her apartment at Whitehall : “ Following his Majesty this morning through the gallery,” he noted in his diary during October of the year 1683, “ I went with the few who attended him, into the Duchess of Portsmouth’s

dressing-room within her bed-chamber, where she was in her morning loose garment, her maids combing her, newly out of bed, his Majesty and the gallants standing about her ; but that which engaged my curiosity, was the rich and splendid furniture of this woman's apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down and rebuilt to satisfy her prodigal and expensive pleasures, whilst her Majesty does not exceed some gentlemen's ladies in furniture and accommodation. Here I saw the new fabric of French tapestry, for design, tenderness of work, and incomparable imitation of the best paintings, beyond anything I had ever beheld. Some pieces had Versailles, St. Germains, and other palaces of the French King, with huntings, figures, and landscapes, exotic fowls, and all to the life rarely done. Then for Japan cabinets, skreens, pendule clocks, great vases of wrought plate, tables, stands, chimney-furniture, sconces, branches, braseras etc., all of massy silver and out of number, besides some of her Majesty's best paintings." And then, as if suddenly remembering himself, he adds : " What contentment can there be in the riches and splendour of this world, purchased with vice and dishonour ? " But such qualms as these were not of a kind to trouble the Duchess's conscience. Nothing mattered to her so long as she kept a

hold over the King's affections, and dominated her rivals, Nell Gwyn and the Duchess Mazarin.

Towards the end of the year 1684, "the King was observed to be more than ordinary pensive." Perhaps he realised that even the desires which had outlived his early hopes and enthusiasms were failing him at last. At Newmarket, after seeing his horses lose their races, he would leave his Court to gamble away the night while he retired to bed early, to dream of his projected palace at Winchester, of the designs for the great dome that Christopher Wren had drawn out, and of a new life in the southern county he had lately grown to love. "All this winter, it was noticed that the King looked better than he had done for many years." It was about this time, however, that symptoms of the disease which was to prove fatal began to appear. "He had," says Burnet, "a humour in his leg, which looked like the beginning of the gout, so that for some weeks he could not walk, as he used to do generally three or four hours a day in the Park, which he did commonly so fast, that as it was an exercise to himself, so it was a trouble to all about him to hold up with him." Deprived thus of the simple remedy he had used all his life as an anodyne for spiritual care and an antidote for physical excess, he submitted to the poor alternative of driving out in a carriage,

and retired more frequently to his laboratory, where he was reported to be “running a process for the fixing of mercury.”

In the first month of the New Year, the gouty condition began to yield slowly to treatment. On the 1st of February, the weather being perishingly cold, he went driving with his trusted servant, Lord Ailesbury, and “at supper did eat with an excellent stomach – and one thing very hard of digestion, a goose egg, if not two.” Many years after, Ailesbury would remember this night. “I shall be most happy this week,” his master had remarked to him, in reference to his new palace, “for my building will be covered with lead”; and Ailesbury, recording the incident in his memoirs, would add: “In less than seven days his dead body lay in its leaden shell.” Evelyn, too, would remember it. “I can never forget,” he says, “the inexpressible luxury and prophaneness, gaming and all dissoluteness, and as it were total forgetfulness of God (it being Sunday evening) which I was witness of, the King sitting and toying with his concubines, Portsmouth, Cleveland, and Mazarin, etc., a French boy singing love-songs: in that glorious gallery, whilst about twenty of the great courtiers and other dissolute persons were at Basset round a large table, a bank of at least 2000 in gold before them.” Charles never

entered that glorious gallery again. The same night, in the great bedchamber he shared with Ailesbury and Henry Killigrew, among his numerous spaniels, which growled and started from their sleep as the hours chimed out irregularly from a dozen clocks — the cold wind whistling along the floor and howling in the chimney where a great pile of Scotch coal burned — Charles, half dazed with sleep and covered only with a night-shirt, stumbled to an adjoining room and there, helpless and unattended, was overcome with a sudden, unprecedented giddiness. With difficulty he regained his bed, but in the morning he was speechless when Lord Craven came to receive from him the password for the day. A little later, while he was being shaved, he fell back convulsed and senseless into Ailesbury's arms, and, as he was being carried back to bed, turned and murmured to the latter, as if suddenly aware of his condition : “ I see you love me dying as well as living.”

Although the alarm was raised instantly and the doors of the palace were ordered to be shut “ to prevent a crowd,” the situation was manifestly so critical that no time could be spared for a consultation, and Edmund King, his personal physician, bled him on his own responsibility. In consequence, by the time the Duke of York had hurried

over from St. James's Palace, a slipper on one foot, a shoe on the other, the danger had passed, and in the afternoon it was possible to inform the anxious, waiting crowds, the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, Lieutenants of the City, and many other callers, that a slight improvement had occurred. Throughout the next two days, the twelve physicians of the household conferred desperately, prescribing strange and impossible medicines ; but as the convulsions returned and grew more violent, and the King lay huddled and exhausted, yet never complaining except "with great decency," those who watched knew that even the celebrated Bezoar Stone and Ralegh's precious remedy would avail nothing, and that he had passed beyond all human aid.

Meanwhile, Barillon — the French Ambassador — being told by the Duke of York that the King was in "very grave danger," and seeing his long-awaited opportunity, sought divine assistance in the form of a Catholic priest. On Thursday evening, Charles, who had resolutely refused to take the Sacrament of the Church of England, was asked if he would receive him, and replied quietly : "Yes, with all my heart." Between seven and eight o'clock, therefore, a certain Father Huddleston who, more than thirty years before — on the 7th of September, 1651 — had

helped to conceal Charles at Moseley Hall during his flight from Worcester Field, was introduced by a secret staircase into the King's presence. By the Duke of York's command, the room had been cleared and the door double-locked, and there remained only the Earls of Bath and Faversham and one of the Queen's Portuguese priests, who had fetched the Holy Sacrament from her chapel at Somerset House. When Charles understood who it was they had brought, he raised himself a little in the bed and whispered to him : " You that saved my body is now come to save my soul."

After the ceremony, which lasted some three-quarters of an hour, Charles rallied a little, as if this confirmation of faith had given him strength, and towards midnight the Queen came to his bedside. The strain of the last few days had been more than she had been able to bear, and though at first " she had been present with him as long as her extraordinary passion would give her leave," she had finally collapsed and, compelled to excuse herself, had sent word begging her husband's pardon " if she had ever offended him in all his life " ; to which he is said to have replied : " Alas ! Poor woman ! She beg *my* pardon ! I beg hers with all my heart." When she had been led away, he commended in turn to his brother's charge the Duchess of Portsmouth, saying that

"he had always loved her and that he loved her now to the last," and then his children - though of Monmouth, whom he loved best, he could not speak - and afterwards Nell Gwyn, beseeching him especially to care for her and to see to it that she did not starve ; and, finally, turning to the whole company, he blessed them all as they knelt sorrowing about his bed. Nevertheless, it is reported that "the grief of the Duchess of Portsmouth did not hinder her packing and sending many strong boxes to the French Ambassador's." And it is related also how, on the second day of the King's illness, "the chamber being kept dark she came and went of the inside of the bed, and sat down on it, and taking the King's hand in hers, felt his two great diamond rings ; and thinking herself alone, asked him what he did with them on, and said she would take them off, and did it at the same time, and, looking up saw the Duke of the other side, stedfastly looking on her, at which she blushed much, and held them towards him, and said, 'Here, Sir, will you take them ?' 'No, Madam,' said he, 'they are as safe in your hands as mine. I will not touch them, till I see how things go.' "

At daybreak on the 7th of February he called for the curtains to be drawn and the windows thrown wide open, in spite of the cold, and

deputed one of his attendants to re-wind the eight-day clock which he had always regulated himself. So, for a few hours, he continued, speechless and dying, always behaving with "a calm and constancy that amazed all who were about him." Then, as the morning advanced, he fell asleep for the last time, and in a little while died peacefully, "just at high water and full moon, at noon" — the hour of his birth — in the fifty-fifth year of his age.

The usual suspicions that he had been poisoned were silenced when his body was opened after death, and his brother, James, was duly and publicly proclaimed King, without disturbance of any kind and with little apparent misgiving. On the following Monday, the Duke of Norfolk, as Earl Marshal, issued the traditional orders for mourning to the Lords, Privy Councillors, and Officers of the Household, though an outward show of grief was already evident in every grade of society, there being "scarce a servant maid betwixt White-Chapell and Westminster, who was not in black crape." Yet the funeral, which took place in Westminster Abbey after nightfall on the 14th of February, was not attended by any remarkable pomp or circumstance — a sad but significant contrast to the splendid ceremony of the Restoration a quarter of a century before.

Sorrow, ever fickle at the death of great men, scarcely outlasted the three days' vigil while the King's body rested in the Princes' Chamber at Westminster.

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So little dies with a king which can be accounted an individual loss, that it is perhaps natural that regret should be short-lived, since the mourning of a whole nation is not an expression of a personal bereavement. Grief springs easily and fades as quickly in the heart of the people whenever a great figure dies, and above all at the deaths of kings and princes. The sceptre, and with it the power and majesty it represents, passes to another hand, and the prerogatives of the Crown are invested in a successor. Although these were gradually diminishing as the seventeenth century drew to its close, and the influence of the Government acting through Parliament steadily increasing, the Crown then was still more than the mere symbol it has since become.

A king must be judged differently from his subjects, even the most eminent; yet Charles II, more than any other monarch, has been

distinguished too often by those very qualities he possessed in common with all men. It is not the prerogative of a king, for instance, to have many mistresses, or to indulge extravagant fancies, although his opportunities for doing so are greater than any man's ; it is, however, his peculiar misfortune that nothing in his life can happen unobserved. While it is notorious that an individual's private affairs arouse more general curiosity than his public performances, truth may be distorted and fairness sacrificed by over-emphasis of the one at the expense of the other. It is, in fact, a fault common to many of the biographies that have been written about Charles II, that too much regard has been paid to the intimate affairs of the "Merry Monarch" or "old Rowley," as he was sometimes rudely called after a famous stallion, and too little to his conduct and policy as king. The balance between the two is certainly not easy to maintain, for, as Halifax truly remarks : "A King is to be such a distinct Creature from a Man, that their Thoughts are to be put in quite a differing Shape, and it is such a disquieting Task to reconcile them, that Princes might rather expect to be lamented than to be envied, for being in a Station that exposeth them, if they do not do more to answer Men's Expectations than human Nature will allow."

This balance and discrimination Halifax consistently preserved in his own impartial *Character of Charles II*, the subtlety of which makes all others seem superfluous. “He is under the Protection of common Frailty,” he says in that place; “should no body throw a Stone at his Faults but those who are free from them, there would be but a slender Shower. It is but Justice, therefore, to this Prince, to give all due Softenings to the less shining Parts of his Life; to offer Flowers and Leaves to hide, instead of using Aggravations to expose them. Let his Royal Ashes then lie soft upon him, and cover him from harsh and unkind Censures; which though they should not be unjust, can never clear themselves from being indecent.”

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